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Bible and Violence

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Editorial

When Patriarch Joseph revealed himself to his brothers in Egypt in a vividly emotional scene, he said, "I am your brother. Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. And do not be distressed or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life" (Gen 45:4-5). Anybody who reads the story of the envious brothers of Joseph, how they, acting on their envy, hatred and vengeance, sold Joseph to Egypt, as narrated in Gen. 37, would marvel at the words of Joseph to his brothers?

The words come from the heart of a person who has gone through a revolutionary evolution in silence and quiet. His heart is centered on God in whom he finds the meaning of all that happened in his life, including the bitter negative experiences. Joseph went through an evolution within him from violence to non-violence! Hence instead of identifying his brothers as the cause of his present fate and taking vengeance, he wants them to understand as brothers of the same family under the same father. Only such a person would be able to say... "Not that you sold me to Egyptians... But that God sent me here before you to preserve life!"

It would be monotonous to enumerate the recent events of violence in the different parts of the world. We must be ashamed! Yet, we cannot forget the fact! With shame, but for hope, we should remember the nakedness of the violence and terror! With pain we should remember that 40% of the budget of every nation is spent on defense from violence, for offense through violence!

Is there a shortcut to non-violence? Could the scientists succeed in identifying the presence of Gene, called serotonin which is a form of neurotransmitter as the source of violence in human beings

and control the violence by controlling serotonin or produce human beings without the possibility of being violent? They would be automatic machines and not human beings! Violence should be stopped through a conscious decision from the part of the human.

When we turn to the Scriptures we find on their pages an evolution from violence to non-violence, in human beings and in the way God is conceived as acting. The patterns presented in the early stages have become obsolete, through later developments. But even they do contain the fore-shadowings. Joseph's attitude is such. The final stage is the decisive revolution in Jesus. That is the perfect pattern of non-violence.

Let us make this journey together, thanks to the Bible scholars Lawrance John William OCD, Peter Ignatius S.J., Henry Pattarumadathil S.J, Paddy Meagher S.J, and Augustine Mulloor OCD, through Patriarchal History, Exodus and conquest tradition, Prophetic teachings and the Gospels.

A silent revolution within us, from polytheism to monotheism, from fighter-God concept to Father-God concept, from violation of frontiers to transcendence of frontiers, is the only solution to violence.

If only we all could write our biographies without any shadow of bitterness and anger in it and to be able to say "God sent me here before you to preserve life and so you did not sell me to Egyptians"!

Augustine Mulloor

Violence in the Patriarchal History

Lawrence John William

This is an investigation into the theme of violence in the patriarchal history. Evil in the form of violence was part of that history. The enquiry pivots on the gravity, cause and results of violence in patriarchal history. It does not justify violence, but shows that violence was part of human reality from the very beginning. The theme of violence is subordinate to the theological concerns of the narratives.

Introduction

Violence is omnipresent today than ever. The peoples of all nations are caught up in the web of violence, some using it against others and some falling as its victims. Various motives go behind the logic of violence. Some out of fear, others out of envy, still others out of vengeance and for many other reasons people take to violence. There is ambiguity as regards the attitudes of people towards violence. Violence is supported or shunned according as the surroundings one finds oneself. Recourse to sacred and secular motives is taken to justify or explain one's stand. Is violence a modern phenomenon? Is it peculiar to certain people to a particular territorial or historical setting alone? The entire cosmos has survived from several violent turbulences and transformations. History has all along witnessed violence in one form or another from the beginning up to now.

This article tries to probe into Genesis 12-50 with a particular reference to the Patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob with regard

to the theme of violence. The gravity, the cause, the results and the consequent themes as a result of violence in the lives of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob will be presented in the following pages. We begin with an analysis of the root for 'violence'. The violence in the stories of each patriarch is taken up in order. An overall view of the patriarchal history and the theology of these narratives will follow.

The theme of violence is not a prominent one in the lives of the patriarchs. It would however help us to see if the patriarchal history has anything to say on the theme of violence. The theme is so actual and urgent today.

HMS =Violence

The Hebrew root for the word 'violence' is *hms*. The verbal forms denote either physical or ethical violence – 'to treat violently/to suffer violence'. Violence is also understood in the figurative sense of not nourishing, hence killing. As noun violence very specifically refers to the physical violence but not exclusively. Violence is conceived basically as a transgression of a norm. Neither the root nor its derivatives appear in our chapters on the Patriarchs. Concordances and Dictionaries do not elaborate the theme of violence, all the more in the history of the Patriarchs. However there are few stray instances of violence that we would like to highlight through the following analysis.

Violence in the Story of Abraham

Already before the introduction of the patriarchal history, the initial satisfaction of God regarding his creation that 'it was very good' (Gen 1:31), is shattered as 'the earth was corrupt' and 'was filled with violence' (Gen 6:11 and 13). We only have the general statements regarding the wickedness and evil of humans before the story of Noah and the tower of Babel. The only cruelty presented in detail is the fratricide of Abel by Cain.

The themes of choice, promise and faith run through the various episodes of Abraham's life. Abraham is chosen to be the father of the nations. The promises to Abraham include progeny and lands

to possess. As the story evolves, Abraham does not witness the realization of any of these promises. Abraham is tested and he is called upon to believe that the promises would come true. Abraham lives in the hope of fulfilment rather than in the joy of realization of the promises.

However the conflict motive is not less evident in the Abraham saga. Abraham was very rich in livestock and other possessions. The same could be said of Lot. It was difficult for them to live together and avoid conflicts. Abraham takes the initiative to invite Lot to choose the direction he would like to move to. Abraham wants to settle the possible conflict that would arise between him and Lot, between his herdsmen and those of Lot (13:8-9).¹

Four kings against five battles in the Valley of Siddim. The kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled and the enemy took all the goods and provisions of Sodom and Gomorrah. Lot and his goods are also taken away. One of the allies fleeing informs Abraham that his nephew had been taken captive. Abraham does not hesitate to go on routing and pursuing to free his nephew Lot. However he is not interested in the gain (14:14-24).

Conflicts between Sarah and Hagar pull Abraham apart. Sarah appeals to Abraham because Hagar seeing that she has conceived looked with contempt on Sarah (16:5). Abraham lets Sarah have her way. Sarah's harshness makes Hagar run away and Ishmael will be at odds with all his kin². When Isaac is born to Sarah, she then casts away Hagar and Ishmael (21:9-14). Abraham sends Hagar and Ishmael away unwillingly and he does so on the insistence of Sarah and on the assurance of God's promise that Ishmael too will be made a great nation.

Two angels come to Sodom. Lot invites them to his house to spend the night. They refused. But because Lot insisted they entered

1 Conflicts over wells of water arise between Abraham and Abimelech (21:25-30) and between the herdsmen of Isaac and those of Gerar (26:17-21).

2 "He shall be a wild ass of a man, with his hand against everyone, and everyone's hand against him; and he shall live at odds with all his kin" (16:12).

his house and enjoyed the hospitality of Lot. The men of Sodom, both young and old, wanted to know the two angels whom Lot received into his house as guests. Lot tried to persuade them not to; he even offered his two virgin daughters to their wish. But they would not listen and as Lot refused to yield to their wish, 'they pressed hard against the man Lot' (19:9).

A classical piece of moving story is the Command to Sacrifice Isaac. "*Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains that I shall show you*" (22:2). Abraham was stopped on time before the execution of this command. Sacrifice of his own beloved son Isaac was demanded of Abraham; but God only tested Abraham (22:1-19).

The reason of being kindred and Abraham's willingness to give in brings about a peaceful settlement of the possible territorial conflict between Abraham and Lot, between Abraham's herdsmen and Lot's. Abraham plays the defender of Lot from his captives. He proves to be a valiant warrior on the occasion. Abraham does not play the role of the arbiter between Sarah and Hagar. It distresses Abraham that such conflicts between his wife Sarah and his slave-woman Hagar happen.

The men of Sodom harassed Lot to give in to their desires. The angels defended themselves and Lot struck the men of Sodom with blindness. God who demanded the cruel sacrifice of Abraham, to test Abraham, prevented any harm to be inflicted on Isaac, once Abraham faced the test bravely. These episodes point to the conflicts within the family and without. The events of violence are not pronounced in the Story of Abraham.

Violence in the Story of Isaac

Isaac is part of the story of Abraham and Jacob. Isaac does not emerge as a prominent figure with his individual traits. Isaac's birth is announced to Abraham (17:19-21) and Sarah brings forth a son whom Abraham at the age of hundred, names Isaac, circumcises him and celebrates the day he was weaned (21:3-5.8).

Abraham sends his messenger to seek a wife for Isaac and when Rebekah is brought back Isaac marries and delights in her (24). As in the story of Abraham, Isaac presents Rebekah his wife as his sister for fear the men of Gerar might harm him to have Rebekah who was 'attractive in appearance' (26:6-11). Isaac blesses Jacob whom Rebekah presented in the disguise of her elder son Esau (27:1-29). Isaac asks Jacob not to marry a Canaanite woman, instead sends him to take as wife a daughter of Laban (28:1-5). Isaac's episodes serve to bridge the narratives of Abraham and Jacob.

When Abraham was tested, Isaac himself was the victim to be sacrificed. However he was spared at the right time as the Lord was only testing Abraham (22:1-19). When Abimelech sent Isaac away from Gerar because of his prosperity, Isaac settles down at the valley of Gerar. Isaac's servants dug a well of spring water. The herdsmen of Gerar quarreled with those of Isaac. They dug another well over which too they quarreled (26:17-21). This is the only incident of quarrel we find in the Isaac narrative. Isaac moves on from there to avoid the conflict.

Violence in the Jacob Story

Jacob struggles already in the womb of his mother (25:22-23). Esau was hungry and Isaac took away the birthright from Esau on that occasion (25:29-34). With the help and shrewdness of his mother he also appropriates the blessing proper to Esau (27:1-29). To escape Esau's anger and also to find a wife for him, Jacob moves to Paddanaram (27:41-28,5).

Laban deceives Jacob in that Leah was given while Jacob served seven years for Rachel (29:25).³ Later on Jacob flees from Laban with all that he had (31). A man wrestled with Jacob at Peniel. Jacob's hip was put out of joint (32:24-25). Jacob's strength is tested and he is blessed after he is struck.

3 One speaks about the divine justice for Jacob deceived his brother Esau, as regards his birthright and blessing. Here his father-in-law deceives him.

Shechem, son of Hamor seized the daughter of Jacob Dinah and lay with her by force. He violated her; she was humbled. In other words, she was degraded to the extent of not being able to enjoy the status of fully valid marriage. They asked her in marriage. The sons of Jacob wanted the men of the city to be circumcised. But when they were still in pain, Simeon and Levi killed all the males of the city with their swords; the 'weapons of violence' (49:5). The other brothers took away the spoils (34:25-29).

Jacob's story moves in the line of deception, cheating. There is also the element of fear that makes one flee from his adversaries. Struggle extends from one's kin to the messenger of God himself. Simeon and Levi had their justification; yet they were excluded from the blessing of possessing lands (49:5-7); divine justice does not spare them, even if they are the chosen ones. It is a story of revenge and bloodshed.

Patriarchal History

From the biblical accounts of the Patriarchs alone we are at a loss to determine the exact historical setting of the lives of the Patriarchs. From the various references and the archaeological findings of recent times some say that the period of the Patriarchs falls into around 350 years from about 1650 B.C.⁴ The patriarchal stories belong to the pre-political stage of the Israelite history.

The traditions of Abraham and Isaac are connected with southern Palestine especially with Beersheba and Mamre. The Jacob traditions centre on the sanctuaries of the central Palestine, Bethel, Shechem and Penuel.⁵

We should not take the patriarchal episodes as strictly historical documents. Precise chronological narration of the events is not the aim of Genesis. The existing traditions and stories are taken

4 A. S. Herbert, *Genesis 12-50* (SCM Press: London 1983⁷) 19. To quote *Bible Works 4.0* the timeline assigned for Abraham extends from 1955 B. C. to 1780 B.C; for Isaac from 1855 B.C. to 1751 B.C. and for Jacob from 1795 B.C. to 1647 B. C.

5 G. von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, tr. D. M. G. Stalker (London 1977) 166.

up and presented with the view to their theological significance. Genesis is a blend of history, mythology and theology.

Violence in the Stories of Abraham , Isaac and Jacob Fear of Violence

Abraham and Sarah enter the land of Egypt. Abraham presents Sarah as his sister for fear they would kill him to take his beautiful wife. When Isaac settled in Gerar, he acts like Abraham and presents Rebekah as his sister. It goes well with both of them but they had their initial fear lest they would be killed. Jacob is afraid of his brother Esau whom he had cheated.

Readiness for Violence

Abraham wages war against the captors of Lot. To defend his kin Abraham was prepared and went on routing and freeing Lot and his possessions. There is a struggle going on already within the womb of Rebekah between her two sons. Jacob is ready to wrestle with the angel of God.

Property the Cause

Abraham foresees the conflict that would arise between his herdsmen and those of Lot on account of the pasturelands. When Abimelech sent Jacob away, Jacob's servants and the men at the valley of Gerar quarrel over wells.

Honour – Morality

The rape of Dinah points to the honour, the morality as the cause of violence. She is violated and her brothers Simeon and Levi took to violence to avenge Shechem. To avoid violence Abraham and Isaac were ready to hide the real identity of their wives. They present them as their sisters.

Roots

Anger lay at the root of the violence of Simeon and Levi on the men of Shechem and the oxen were struck due to their whim. "Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce, and their wrath, for it is cruel!" (49:7). Themes of jealousy and rejection dominate the struggles between Sarah and Hagar. Revenge leads Simeon and

Levi to kill Shechem and other men for the rape of their sister Dinah.

Results of Violence

The principal effects of violence are the destruction of physical or social life. The patriarchal history underlies more the destruction of social life. The relational aspects between the members of the same family or between neighbours suffer damage. To restore the wealth to Lot, Abraham undertakes to violence. Simeon and Levi use violence to revenge the dishonour done to their sister Dinah.

The Oddities of the Patriarchal Episodes

To our modern sensibilities, what Sarah and Abraham at her chiding did to Hagar and Ishmael, seem unjust. But it was more in accordance with the customs of the time.⁶ Abraham was about to harm his only son Isaac. But the emphasis of the event is not on harming Isaac but it was a test to Abraham. The wrestling of Jacob with the angel of God goes in line with the heroic deeds of the mythical figures.

Theology rather than History

The patriarchal narratives are theological interpretation of the historical experiences of the tribes of Israel. The story of Genesis 14 for example is a pseudo-historiographical composition that wants to depict Abraham as a powerful man on whose side Yahweh

6 As M. T. Monro, *Thinking about Genesis* (Henry Regnery Company: Chicago 1966) 86 describes, "Babylonian marriage practice was normally monogamy. But if a wife had no child, it was praiseworthy in her to offer her husband one of her slave-girls. The initiative lay with the wife; the husband had no right to force the arrangement upon her; her choice had to be entirely free. Such a slave-woman, freely presented by the wife to the husband, became a freewoman if she bore a son, so long as she and her offspring continued respectful to her former mistress. But if she or the child forgot themselves and failed in respect, she reverted to the status of slave, and her mistress had the right to do as she liked with her. Poor helpless Abraham, when the row blew up between the two women, could only say, 'Is she not in thy power, thy own maidservant? Do what thou wilt with her' (16:6). Such was the low, or custom more inexorable than law".

stands and Abraham takes possession of the land. The four kings stand for the four corners of the world. Abraham is the chosen one from among all the peoples and God's promise to him include progeny and possession of the land of Canaan. It is an affirmation of God's sovereignty over history.⁷

The salvation history of the whole of Genesis pivots on the themes of election and elimination. God's choice implies the exclusion of others from the special favours. Abraham is chosen and not Lot his nephew; of the sons of Abraham, Isaac is chosen and not Ishmael and of the two sons of Isaac, Jacob is chosen and not Esau. The choices might seem absurd and consequent exclusions inexplicable. But the narratives are concerned with their theological import than the logic.

Conclusion

The Greek philosopher Heraclitus' saying, 'violence is father and king of everything' seems to have its truth even today as it was also in the days of the founding fathers of the ancient people of Israel. Man can annihilate himself through violence. It is a choice left to the humanity to let itself survive or to make itself disappear completely from the face of the universe.

The depiction of the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob with their strengths and at the same time with their flaws should not surprise us. The biblical authors did not want to describe the individuals as we might like them to be but as they are in themselves. These stories are an example of the realism of the Bible.

Genesis is only the beginning. The stories of the fathers have their value for the rest of the posterity. Evil, in our case in the form of violence, was always a part of the story. We have to avoid

7. For a detailed study of Genesis 14 with examples to prove the pseudo-historiographical nature of the same see, K. Luke, *Studies on the Book of Genesis* (Alwaye 1975) 49-59.

both the fundamentalism to apply the logic of Genesis to our relationships and the anachronism to read today's realities into the patriarchal events.

The inconsistencies of the patriarchal narratives are understood only in the light of salvation-history perspective. Genesis' stories are the theological reflections on historical experiences of the people of Israel. The Patriarchs are the representative symbols of the entire chosen people of Yahweh.

Violence disrupts the relational and functional dimensions of the individuals. It is violation of a norm, even when only human individuals are involved. Violence is not justified but it is part of the human reality even at the time of the Patriarchs themselves. God writes straight with crooked lines! Does He?

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Tamil Nadu

Interpretative Theories of Israelite Settlement

Peter Ignatius

One of the most impressive expression of violence is the conquest of the promised land by Israelites. Before dealing with this theme in the next article, a preparatory reflection on the interpretative theories of Israelite settlement is in order. In this article four ways of understanding this event are presented practically: conquest theory, peaceful infiltration, pastoral Canaanites, social revolution.

Introduction

As the title suggests, this study holds the different theories of Israelite settlement merely as “interpretative theories”.¹ It is customary for any archaeologist to take a given artifact, or a non-artifact or a literary source and interpret them suitably to prove his/her thesis². Through the same artifact each one is able to criticize another’s proposition and prove one’s own.

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- 1 This term is used by R. S. Hess, “Early Israel in Canaan: A Survey of Recent Evidence and Interpretations”, *Palestine Exploration Quarterly*, 125 (1993) 139.
 - 2 N. K. Gottwald, gives an example of how Aharoni, Fritz and Kempinski signing up differently from each other concerning the excavations of Tel Masos, “Israelite Settlement As a Social Revolution”, *Biblical Archaeology Today* (1985) 40. And A. Mazar, brings to notice that while the above three archaeologists agree that the Tel Masos is an Israelite site, it is an Amalekite one for Kochavi, Hersog and Finkelstein, “The Israelite Settlement in Canaan in the Light of Archaeological Surveys”, *Biblical Archaeology Today* (1985) 62.

As R. S. Hess suggests, none of these interpretative theories disprove any conclusions drawn about the origins of Israel.³ So following this clue, let me first summarize the four major interpretative theories, at the end of which I will attempt to give an approach for an interpretation to the Israelite settlement, from the perspective of the relationship between the Bible and Archaeology.

1. Conquest Theory

W. F. Albright and Y. Yadin saw evidences for the violent destruction and subsequent occupation of the conquered Canaanite cities in the late 13th century BCE.⁴

1.1. Archaeological Finding

a. Egyptian Hieroglyphics in the “store cities” of Pithom and Ramaesses, tells of certain people who labored in captivity. This seems to substantiate the narration in Exodus 1-12.

b. The name “Israel” on a late 13th century BCE commemorative stele of Pharaoh Merneptah, boasting of his triumph over it, seems to refer to a people or ethnic group.⁵

c. The thick destruction level of charred beams, collapsed walls, and smashed pottery blanketing ancient Canaanite cities in the Late Bronze Age are proof of concerted military attacks by advancing Israelites.⁶

3. R. S. Hess, “Early Israel in Canaan: A Survey of Recent Evidence and Interpretations”, *Palestine Exploration Quarterly*, 125 (1993) 139.

4. W. F. Albright, *Archaeology and the Religion of Palestine* (Baltimore 1968); Y. Yadin, *The Art of Warfare in Biblical Lands* (McGraw-Hill 1963) Vol. 1.

5. Its translation: “The princes are prostrate, saying: ‘mercy! Not one raises his head among the Nine Bows. Desolation is for Tehenu; Hatti is pacified; plundered is the Canaan with every evil; carried off is Ashkelon; seized upon is Gezer; Yanoam is made as that which does not exist; Israel is laid waste, his seed is not; Hurru is become a widow for Egypt!” *ANET*, 378.

6. Y. Yadin, *The Art of Warfare in Biblical Lands* (McGraw-Hill 1963), Vol. 1, 90.

1.2. Biblical Documentation

Joshua 1-12 deals with the conquest of Canaan under Joshua. The occupation of the country is begun with the crossing of the Jordan and the conquest of Jericho (1-6). This is followed by gaining footholds on the Palestinian mountain range, at Ai, Bethel, and Gibeon (7-9). At the end there are two sweeping campaigns against the city states (Jerusalem, Hebron, Jarmuth, Lachish and Eglon) in the south (10), and in the north (11). In chapter 12 there is a summary. By destroying these cities or driving away the pagan Canaanites from the land, the Israelite tribes achieved their goal and each received a portion of the conquered territory.

1.3. Critique of the Theory

a. There is no archaeological evidence of Jericho having been destroyed by Joshua as noted by the Bible (Josh 11:13). There were no traces of a city wall or destruction levels for the period that the Israelites are supposed to have captured ...⁷

b. At Yarmuth, Arad and Ai, cities specifically mentioned as defeated, archaeologists found no traces of 13th century mass destruction.⁸

c. With an increasing precision in pottery dating, it has become clear that the destruction of individual Canaanite cities occurred at times spread over a hundred years - far too long for any one concerted military campaign. Moreover, there is evidence that many ruined Canaanite cities lay desolate and abandoned for many decades before their occupation by new settlers.⁹

2. Peaceful Infiltration

A. Albrecht and N. Martin propounded that the Israelite

7 S. R. Hess "Early Israel in Canaan: A Survey of Recent Evidence and Interpretations," *Palestine Exploration Quarterly*, 125 (1993) 126.

8 Ibid. 126

9 A. Mazar, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible - 10, 000-586 BCE* (New York 1992) 345-348.

settlement of Canaan was the result of gradual immigration, not of a unified military campaign.¹⁰

2.I. Archaeological Findings

a. The 14th century Tell el Amarana Cuneiform tablets (a collection of diplomatic letters between an Egyptian Pharaoh and various Canaanite princes), give vivid reports of the chaotic political situations in the Late Bronze Period in Canaan, and frequently they mention the activities of a restive and rebellious group called 'apiru' at the frontiers of the settled land. Both Alt and Noth equated the 'apiru' and "Hebrews", and on the evidence of the Amarana Letters, they interpreted that the 'apiru'/Hebrews were already present in Canaan and were hostile to the Canaanite rulers more than a century before the estimated date of the complete Israelite settlement. According to them, the ancient Israelites were pastoral nomads who slowly filtered into the settled land from the desert and after a long period of uneasy coexistence with the population of Canaan, took over the Canaanite city-states.

b. Y. Aharoni discovered in the Upper Galilee the remains of a group of small, unfortified settlements in the traditional territory of the tribe of Naphtali, in which he saw the signs of the arrival of an early wave of 'apiru' or "proto-Israelites".¹¹

c. In the traditional tribal territories of Manasseh, Ephraim, Benjamin and Judah archaeologists have located the remains of approximately 250 Early Iron herdsman's enclosures, hilltop hamlets, and unfortified villages whose architecture and artifacts are much simpler than those found in the Canaanite cities of the preceding Late Bronze Age.¹²

10 A. Albrecht, "The Formation of the Israelite State in Palestine," in *Essays on Old Testament History and Religion* (Oxford 1966) 173-237; N. Martin, "The Settlement of the Israelites in Palestine," in *Essays on Old Testament and Religion* (Oxford 1966). 133-169.

11 N. A. Silberman, "Who were the Israelites?" *Archaeology*, March/April (1992) 26

12 *Ibid.* 26

d. A. Zertal explored the 800-square-mile territory of Manasseh in the northern West Bank and recorded the locations and relative dates of 136 Early Iron Age sites. After examining each site's topography, geology, available water sources and soil quality, he found evidence of a gradual population movement from the eastern fringe into the interior valleys and then to the hill areas during the Early Iron Age.

2.2. Biblical Documentation

That "a mixed multitude also went up with them (Ex 12:38)" shows the possibility that other groups such as the Gibeonites (Joshua ch.9) and Kenites (Jdg 4: 11) joined the Israelites in the conquest. Further, Joshua 8:30-35; 24:1, 32 states that the Israelites merely occupied areas in the hill country, such as the region around Shechem, about which there is no hint of "conquest". It seems that the settlement was peaceful and therefore gradual.¹³

2.3. Critique of the Theory

a. This theory assumes that in the 13th century a discrete ethnic group of semi-nomads had entered Canaan. It also assumes that the material culture of this group was more primitive than that of the native Canaanites. This theory then merely places the Israelite conquest of Canaan in the timeless, sometimes violent, conflict between Middle Eastern farmers and nomads.¹⁴

b. According to R. S. Hess, this theory would clash with the probably proven theory that the Israelites were an amphictyony, modeled after the tribal leagues of Greece, each consisting of twelve tribes with a common sanctuary.¹⁵

13 The advocates of peaceful infiltration theory hold that the nomadic groups lining in "symbiotic relationship" (the term which was used by Fritz) with the settled inhabitants throughout the Fertile Crescent, who could have moved into the hill country and occupied it. Cf. V. Fritz, "Conquest or Settlement? The Early Iron Age in Palestine," *Biblical Archaeologist* 50 (1987) 84-100.

14 N.A. Silberman, "Who Were the Israelites?" *Archaeology*, March/April (1992) 27.

15 R. S. Hess, "Early Israel in Canaan..." *Palestine Exploration Quarterly*, 125 (1993) 27

3. Pastoral Canaanites

According to this theory the Israelites were not pure nomads but rather primarily sheep and goat-herders, pastoralists who roamed with their flocks, not in the midst of the desert but on the fringes of the heavily populated, settled land. The main proponent of this theory is I. Finkelstein.¹⁶ He finds the phenomenon of the "Israelite settlement" to be the result of an epic struggle half a millennium before the generally accepted dates.

3.1. Archaeological Findings

a. Recent archaeological surveys indicate that the hill country of Canaan was thickly settled and dotted with fortified cities, towns, and hamlets after 1750. But that around 1550 the settled population in the hill country declined dramatically. During the succeeding Late Bronze Age (1550-1200), while the large cities along the coast and in the major valleys continued to flourish, more than 90 percent of the permanent settlement sites in the hill country were abandoned and the few surviving sites became smaller in size.¹⁷

b. According to Finkelstein, the pastoral nomads and the settled farmers lived in a 'two way street'.¹⁸ The economic and social conditions induced the pastoralists to become farmers. And vice-versa! Population pressure, competition for scarce agricultural land in the hill region and political changes in the Canaanite city-states caused a shift in the balance between farmers and pastoralists. A large number gradually abandoned their villages in the hill country. While some may have gone to the coast to find work, in the fields and orchards, others, perhaps the majority may have adopted a new, wandering way of life.

16 I. Finkelstein, *The Archaeology of the Israelite Settlement* (Jerusalem 1988) 336-451.

17. N. A. Silberman "Who Were the Israelites?" *Archaeology*, March/April (I 992) 27.

18 I Finkelstein, *The Archaeology of the Israelite Settlement* (Jerusalem 1988) 336-451.

These hill-country farmers turned herdsmen were able to establish a stable, alternative way of life on the desert fringe. For two or three centuries they lived amicably with the settled populations of the large cities along the coasts and in the major valleys, trading with milk, meat, wool, and leather and in return for agricultural produce. Around 1250 the fall of the Mycenaean (the late Bronze Age civilization in Greece) kingdoms disturbed the equilibrium in the entire eastern Mediterranean world, resulting in the disruption of economic and political life in the city-states. The scattered pastoralists in the hill country of Canaan could no longer depend on the regular markets in the coastal and valley cities. Those cities could now hardly support their own inhabitants as a result that the pastoralists were left on their own. When the first clans of wandering herders began to choose unoccupied hilltops for permanent settlements, and started to clear nearby fields in preparation for planting, they became what some archaeologists might call "Early Israelites".

The finds from hundreds of Early Iron Age settlements in the hill country can be seen as evidence of this changing social process: architectural forms; pottery vessels, and even a few cult objects reflect the slow crystallization of a new settled culture on the fringes of Canaanite society.¹⁹

According to W. G. Dever too Israel evolved largely out of local conditions, surviving to changed conditions.²⁰ Among these 'indigenous Canaanites' there were former pastoral nomads from Transjordan, and even some 'Yahwist' tribes that came from Egypt. If these people came to shape the literary tradition disproportionately we can easily account for the biblical view that 'all Israel' had come out of Egypt and entered Canaan forcibly.

19 N. A. Silberman, "Who Were the Israelites?" *Archaeology*, March/April (1992) 30.

20 W. G. Dever, "Cultural Continuity, Ethnicity in the Archaeological Record and the Question of Israelite Origins," in *Eretz Israel Archaeological, Historical and Geographical Studies* (1993) 31.

The reality however is that most Israelites had local Canaanite ancestors, and they knew it. As Ezekiel has his God declare to Israel: "Thus says the Lord GOD to Jerusalem: Your origin and your birth are of the land of the Canaanites; your father was an Amorite, and your mother a Hittite" (Eze 16:3).

3.2. Critique of the theory

a. According to Mazar, 'such a theory perhaps explains the origin of most of the components of the Israelite confederation, but it still does not elucidate the identity of that confederation's nuclear group, which initiated Yahwism and was responsible for the traditions concerning slavery in Egypt, the Exodus, Mount Sinai, and the role of Moses'.²¹

b. T. L. Thompson questions the observation of Finkelstein that people at first settled in the eastern areas since these areas were the best suited for cereals and for pasturing. He also accused this theory of circular reasoning. Moreover, according to him, the settlers were not re-sedentarised nomads but lowland inhabitants who were dispersed eastward.²²

4. Social Revolution

The main proponents of this theory are G. E. Mendenhall and N. K. Gottwald.²³ Mendenhall, reviewing the evidence of the Amarna Letters, judged that the 'apiru', long identified as invading Hebrews, were not an ethnic group at all but a well defined social class. According to him the Late Bronze city-states of Canaan were hierarchically organized societies, with kings, princes, court officials and chariot warriors ... and the rural peasants at the base. The 'apiru' were apparently outside this scheme of

21 A. Mazar, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible 10,000-586 B.E.C.*, 355.

22 T. L. Thomson, "Palestinian Pastoralism and Israel's Origins," *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament*, 6/1 (1992) 1-13.

23 N. K. Gottwald, "The Israelite Settlement as a Social Revolutionary Movement," *Biblical Archaeology Today* (1985) 34-46.

organization, and they seem to have threatened the social order in various ways. Besides being pastoralists on the fringes of the settled land, they also served as mercenaries to the highest bidder and when that work was not available, they encouraged rebellion. This caused social unrest between the rural population and the rulers of the city-states.²⁴

4.1. Findings or Elucidations?

a. The Amarana Letters are filled with reports of famine and other hardships and the increasing demands by the pharaohs. It is no wonder that the 'apiru' were successful in stirring up the peasants and causing many Canaanite royal cities to be destroyed.

b. The 'apiru' and their pastoral supporters were united and overcame feudal domination through a compelling ideology. Mendenhall believes that the worship of a single transcendent God -Yahweh - was a brilliant response to the religion of the Canaanite kings. Their faith was in that single God who established egalitarian laws of social conduct and who communicated with them directly. The hold of the king over the people was therefore effectively weakened by the spread of this new faith. The true Israelite conquest was accomplished, according to Mendenhall, when a large number of Canaanite peasants overthrew their masters and became "Israelites".

c. What strikes Gottwald about the theory is that it provides a link between the religious thrust of Yahwism and the socio-economic and political realities of Canaan. The initial self-ascription of Israel as a people took place in a precarious social organizational matrix, where peasants and other kinds of producers and providers of services struggled to take command of the agrarian means of production. This struggle was the catalyst that brought about their extraordinary self consciousness. When the exodus Israelites entered Canaan they encountered this stress-torn

24 N. A. Silberman., "Who Were the Israelites?" *Archaeology*, March/April (1992) 27.

Canaanite society, which had started declining a century earlier, after the Amarna Age. They allied themselves with the Canaanite lower classes, since they shared a lower-class identity with them. This struggle also triggered off the religious cult which in turn validated and energized them. It was the mixture of a new political economy and a new religion which pulled peoples of varying identities together, and initiated a new integrated cultural development that led to the creation of a new ethnic identity.

d. As noted in 2.2, the Biblical text indicates that groups such as the Gibeonites and Kenites, who were already in the land, allied themselves with the tribes of Israel. Just as David was joined by many drifters and other dispossessed peoples when he fled from Saul, so also early Israel was joined by many who found in it a more desirable community in which to live. The Bible records some of the earliest settlement activities of the Israelites in Canaan as taking place in the central hill country north of Jerusalem and south of the Jezreel Valley.²⁵

4.2. Critique of the theory

a. No evidence as yet been found for a major demographic shift from the coast to the hill country.

b. This theory does not rise up a mere hypothesis. Moreover, comparative studies of pottery and architecture in a modern Cypriot village have demonstrated that diversity in these features implies nothing about ethnicity.²⁶

Conclusion : an Approach to an Interpretation

As noted in the introduction, the various theories that have been set forth can only be tentative. Back of the theories, taken to be proved by their proponents, are under generalizations that cannot be made about all aspects of the process in which the Israelites

25 R. S. Hess, "Early Israel in Canaan..." *Palestine Exploration Quarterly*, 125 (1993) 130.

26 *Ibid.* 130.

finally settled in Canaan. The Bible itself does not present data amenable to any one theory. The archaeological results lead to the conclusion that the final settlement was due to the combination of several factors and each theory account for only a part of the action.

What is proposed here is an “approach” to the stories of the origin of the Israelites. The Bible gives a faith explanation of the Israelites’ history. In such an explanation, one incident becomes *the event* in and through which the rest of the happenings will be told, even the creation of the universe! Every other incident is altered or adopted to suit that fundamental faith *event* wherein the community experienced its God very powerfully. To the Israelite community (its ethnic unity developed very late) the liberation from Egypt was *the event*, through which they gauged the whole of their history. Each of the many human communities that eventually made up the Israelites may have had their own special experiences, but the unifying element of the diverse groups was the exodus experience. This *event* creates their united history! A parallel is experience of “Americans”. People who came from various foreign political and cultural backgrounds, together with the original inhabitants of a northern continent fought a war of independence and in the process, came to call themselves as “Americans”. It depends on who writes the history of the origin of “Americans” which will determine which is the cardinal event and who were its heroes and enemies.

In the Bible the authors’ intention is to portray their God as the strong warrior God who defeats every people and their gods who stand against Him and His people (Dt 26:5: “And you shall make response before the LORD your God, ‘A wandering Aramean was my father; and he went down into Egypt and sojourned there, few in number: and there he became a nation, great, mighty, and populous). From this perspective one can explain and substantiate the conquest theory of Israelite settlement. But this cannot be the assumption on which one goes for an archaeological dig and to

find evidence. A theological explanation need not tally with what the excavations throw up. And an archaeological explanation is not the only one that can be made, except in the field that is restricted strictly to archaeology.

The understanding of the relationship between Archaeology and the Bible therefore needs further nuancing. Each science has its own importance that cannot be infringed upon the principle and methods of other sciences. The theological and other sciences are complimentary to each other. In stating this, the theological value of the Bible is not reduced. Let the Holy Book be understood on its rich theological plane and let Archaeology help us to discover the earth's rich past from ruined walls and broken pottery.

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Life-deal and Death-deal: an Interpretation of Violence in Exodus

Henry Pattarumadathil

How to understand the violence in the whole event and process of Israelite exodus? When Israelites were oppressed by Egyptians, the latter were acting against the creational purpose of God. It was an attempt to destroy his divine mission of life with death projects. The violent actions in favour of Israel by God and the violence done by Israelites in the context of exodus are to be interpreted within the theological scheme. This perspective is insightfully brought out in this study.

Introduction

The Lord is a man of war;

the Lord is his name.

“Pharaoh’s chariots and his host
he cast into the sea;
and his picked officers are sunk
in the Red Sea (Ex 15: 3-4).

Generation to generation, the people of Israel remembered and celebrated their liberation from bondage in Egypt. They revered, feared, loved and worshipped their God as the Mighty One who brought them out of Egypt. If Exodus was a liberating experience for the Israelites it was a nightmare for the Egyptians. God used force against Egypt to set Israel free. As a result many people

were killed; even nonhuman realities were torn down. How should we understand this divine intervention in human history? By narrating the Exodus story are the biblical writers presenting us the face of a 'violent God' who follows a principle of 'an eye for an eye' and 'a tooth for a tooth' against Pharaoh and the Egyptians? This article attempts to understand and interpret the apparent 'violent actions' in the exodus story from a 'life-deal and death-deal' perspective. Five texts from chapters 1-15 of the book of Exodus, which deal directly with the use of force, are analysed here.¹ Based on a comparative analysis of the attitudes, interpretations and actions of both Pharaoh and God a brief reflection on violence is also made at the end of this article.

Structure of Exodus 1-15

1:1 - 2:25	Death-projects of Pharaoh, Moses' attempts for a life-project
3:1 - 7:13	Call and Mission of Moses for a life-project
7:14 - 11:10	The first nine plagues: life and death struggle
12:1 - 13:16	The sacrifice for life (paschal sacrifice), the blood of the first-born
13:17-15:21	The Exodus and the final struggle at the sea, celebration of victory.

The First three death-projects (Ex. 1:8-22)

The Israelites came to Egypt with a life-deal. Joseph, their ancestor was instrumental in saving Egypt from an otherwise devastating famine. By receiving Jacob and his family in Egypt, the Pharaoh of the time honoured Joseph also with a life-deal. But the 'new king' ignorant of these life-deals perceives the Israelites of his time as a threat to his nation and to his authority. "Behold, the people of Israel are too many and too mighty for us" (Ex 1:9). So he decides to deal them a death blow.

1. The source analysis has identified three interwoven strata, Yahwist, Elohist and Priestly in Exodus 1-15. This article works with the final form of the text which is probably the result of Priestly redaction (exilic and post exilic).

A three-stage programme of oppression is designed: order to impose a ruthless slavery (1:8-14), directives to midwives to kill the Hebrew male babies (1:15-20), and command to throw the Hebrew male children into the Nile (1:22).

The first programme is developed in three stages:

1. The king expresses his fear (1:9) and then he invites the Egyptians to join him to deal with the Israelites 'shrewdly' (1:10).
2. He gets a quick response from the people. His fear gives birth to a national policy of 'death-deal'. "They set taskmasters over them to afflict them with heavy burdens" (Ex 1:11).
3. But this oppression was found counterproductive. 'The more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and the more they spread abroad' (1:12). The counter productivity did not stop the oppressor from continuing his death-project. We are told, the Egyptians made the lives of the Israelites bitter with hard service (1:13).

The second and third programmes had immediate setbacks. The midwives were God-fearing and not king-fearing. So they did not co-operative with the king's project. They thwarted the project very tactfully. When they were questioned about their disobedience they said, "Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women; for they are vigorous and are delivered before the midwife comes to them" (Ex 1:19).²

The order to throw the male children to the Nile makes it possible for Moses to find favour with the princess and to be reared in Pharaoh's palace. When Pharaoh ordered to kill every male child he did not foresee women as a threat to his projects. But paradoxically enough, it was the women who disobeyed the king and initiated the mission for liberation.

2. In Israel's wisdom tradition, the term 'fear of God bears strong ethical connotations. 'The fear of the Lord is hatred of evil', says Proverbs (8:3; see 16:6). In Proverbs 14:2 it is said, 'he who walks in unrighteousness fears the Lord, but He who is devious in his ways despises him'.

The tension between life and death that appears frequently in the book of Exodus is very evidently and clearly introduced in this opening chapter. A fearful oppressor attempts to block God's creation purpose using dreadful measures. Against this death project, the midwives and the daughter of Pharaoh act as life promoting agents.

Call to a life-deal (Ex 2: 11-18)

The real author of the Exodus is Yahweh himself. The first two chapters of the book of Exodus serve as background setting of the story. In the first chapter, the villain and his acts of cruelty are introduced. To counter it the whole of the second chapter is dedicated to Moses, the delegate of Yahweh.

Before the Lord calls Moses and entrusts to him His mission to liberate the Israelites from the hands of the Egyptians, Moses himself feels an internal call to involve in this mission of liberation. Having given a brief description of the birth of Moses and an account of how Pharaoh's daughter miraculously saves him, the author speaks about three life-deals from the life of Moses. All these three incidents are related to justice.

1. He sees an Egyptian beating a Hebrew; he kills the Egyptian and hides him in the sand (Ex 2:12).
2. On the following day of his first intervention he sees two Hebrew men fighting. He intervenes and rebukes them (Ex 2:13)
3. The second intervention causes him to flee from Egypt to Midian where he makes his third intervention for the Midianite women's sake who were harassed by shepherds at the well (Ex 2:15-22).

We are not sure if Moses used force in the last two interventions he made. But he did use it, even in its utmost form, in the first case. But the biblical author is apparently silent about the ethical dimensions of this act. This taciturnity gives us a hint as to how the author of Exodus looks at violence and non-violence.

An Egyptian's beating of a Hebrew and Moses' killing of the Egyptian are symbolic acts in the context of Exodus. When the

Egyptian, a delegate of Pharaoh, treats a Hebrew with a death-deal, Moses, the prospective delegate of God, comes to his rescue with a death-deal. This is what God does exactly in Exodus. When Pharaoh treats the Israelites with a death-deal God intervenes in their defence.

Cry for life (Ex 2:23-25)

Oppression continues even after the death of the king who initiated it. Yet not even a mention has been made by the Biblical writer about God in the whole sequence of sufferings except the apparently incidental mention about the 'God-fearing' midwives. God has been kept in obscurity. But suddenly in the next chapter the story takes a new turn. The cry of the Israelites 'came up to God' (i.e., they cried up to God). God heard their groaning; he remembered his covenant he saw the people and he knew their condition. The use of the verbs of perception (hear, remember, see and know) one after the other explains how God feels about the situation of his people. God himself witnesses the death-deal. How can he be silent now?

God does break the silence. To put a stop to the death-project of Pharaoh and rescue his people God designs a life-project. He tells Moses, "Behold the cry of the people of Israel has come to me, and I have seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them. Come, I will send you to Pharaoh, that you may bring forth my people, the sons of Israel out of Egypt" (3:9-10).

The Plagues : life and death in conflict (Ex 7:14-11, 10; 12:29-32)

God sends his envoy with a life-project to prevent the death-project of the tormentor. The demand was firm: 'Let my people go'. But Pharaoh adamantly refuses to give in to this divine imperative. He says, "Who is the Lord, that I should heed his voice and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord, and moreover I will not let Israel go" (Ex 5:2). As a reaction to this request Pharaoh intensifies his death-deal. He commands the taskmasters and foremen, "Let heavier work be laid upon the men that they may labour at it and pay no regard to lying words" (Ex 5:9). Yahweh could not turn a deaf ear to the cry and grievance of his people and

Moses. He tells Moses, "Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh; for with a strong hand he will send them out, yea, with a strong hand he will drive them out of his land" (Ex 6:1).

The story of the plagues is a story of this 'strong hand'. It was a response to the violent, inhuman and arrogant behaviour of a tyrant who was obsessed with power and chained with fear complexes. An analysis of the pattern of the plague stories would tell us how careful are the biblical writers in presenting the response of God theologically and ethically unassailable! Most of the plague stories follow a six-step pattern.³

1. God sends Moses to Pharaoh to dialogue on his behalf. The Lord's demand is, "let my people go, that they may serve me". This demand is followed by a threat of plague.
2. Pharaoh refuses to let the people go.
3. The Lord sends the plague.
4. Pharaoh calls Moses to negotiate and he promises the release of the people.
5. Moses intercedes and the plague is removed.
6. Pharaoh's heart is hardened. He refuses to keep his word and let the people go.

Nine times the process is repeated, every time Pharaoh becomes more and more stubborn. And finally with the tenth one, the plague on the first-born, Pharaoh gives up and lets the people go.

Rita Burns in her short commentary on Exodus makes the following reflection about the divine act in the plague episode: "The narratives make it clear that the God of the plagues is not a Divinity arbitrarily bent on destruction. Instead God is the One

3. All except two plague stories are from the Yahwist author. The Y follow this six-step pattern. The two plague stories, the plagues of gnats (8:16-19) and boils (9:8-12) are commonly viewed as coming from the Priestly author. They share a slightly different pattern: 1) God commands Moses to initiate actions through which the plagues will be effected. 2) The instructions are followed and the plague ensues. 3) A reference to Egyptian magicians. 4) Pharaoh's heart is hardened and he did not listen. Thus, the stage is set for the next plague story. See, R. J. Burns *Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers* (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, Inc. 1983) 69-70.

who is zealous and uncompromising with regard to the welfare of the oppressed. The Divinity repeatedly calls for Pharaoh to join in mediating God's saving work in the world".⁴

To mock at the miracles performed by Moses and Aaron, and thereby to belittle the divine act Pharaoh uses his magicians. It underlines the fact that Yahweh's struggle with Pharaoh was in every way a real struggle and as such was marked by ambiguity and tension.⁵

Pharaoh began the oppression of the Israelites when the creational promise of fruitfulness was being fulfilled in Israel (Ex I:7). So Pharaoh's oppressive measures against Israel are fundamentally anti-life and anti-creation. Reflecting along this line, Terence E. Fretheim interprets the plagues as the effect of Pharaoh's anticreational sins. "Generally, it may be said that the plagues are ecological signs of historical disaster. They function in a way not unlike certain ecological events in contemporary society, portents of unmitigated historical disaster".⁶ The effect of the plague was not just on Pharaoh and the Egyptians alone. Every sphere of the created order like water, the land, various plants and animals, even the air is adversely affected. "The plagues are fundamentally concerned with the natural order; each plague has to do with various non human phenomena. The collective image presented is that the entire created order is caught up in this struggle, either as cause or as victim. Pharaoh's anti-life measures against God's creation have unleashed chaotic powers that threaten the very creation that God intended".⁷

A murder to let live (Ex 14:5-31)

The height of Pharaoh's hardness of heart and obsession with power are depicted in his decision to pursue Israel even after he ordered them to leave. "When the king of Egypt was told that the

4. R.J. Burns, *Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers*, 71.

5. *Ibid.*, 74.

6. T.E. Fretheim, "The Plagues as Ecological Signs of Historical Disaster", *JBL* 110 (1991) 387.

7. *Ibid.*, 393.

people had fled, the mind of Pharaoh and his servants was changed toward the people and they said, 'What is this we have done, that we have let Israel go from serving us'? So he made ready his chariots and took his army with them" (Ex 14:5-6).

The plagues, the culmination of which was the death of the first-born, the consequent expulsion of the Hebrews from Egypt and the rituals connected with it were not the end of the story. The real freedom from Egyptian domination is secured only when God delivered the Hebrews at the sea. At the end of the story we are told, "Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the seashore" (Ex 14:30).

What did Israel learn about their God from this experience? In Exodus 13:18 it is said that the Israelites went up out of Egypt armed for battle. But 14:10 says: "When Pharaoh drew near, the people of Israel lifted up their eyes, and behold, the Egyptians were marching after them; and they were in great fear". Caught between the sea and Pharaoh's army they complained to Moses and to God. But God fought like a warrior (15:3) and delivered them. Thus the Divine warrior secured the life and well being of the redeemed people.

Here again it is Pharaoh who initiates the death-deal. His antilife policy urges him to chase Israel. In order to let his people live God once again stretches his arm against the Egyptians.

Violence in Exodus

To keep a people in bondage, oppress them more and more when they ask for freedom, and pursue them even after their release are certainly violent deeds. Needless to say that every step Pharaoh takes in the exodus story is a violent step. But how should we interpret the divine interventions, especially the episodes of plague and the event at the sea? Are they not violent deeds too?

No deed can be evaluated by the final action alone. 'Every deed in human life, whether violent or non-violent, is in fact a response'. It is the result of a long process that takes place within and about us. Our responses precede an interpretation of reality. And our interpretations are influenced by our belief system and worldview. Using this human principle let us make a comparative analysis of the deeds of Pharaoh and God.

	Pharaoh	God
The <i>Situation</i>	Israel multiplied exceedingly and increased in number	
Basic feeling	Fear	Love, compassion
Interpretation	Threat to the nation	Fulfilment of the creational promise
Attitude	Israel, enemies of Egypt; they should serve the <i>Egyptians</i>	<i>Israel</i> , my people, they should be free
	Order to kill: throw male children into the Nile.	Order to save: call of Moses and Aaron.
Response	Oppression: hard labour, <i>task masters, slavery, pursuit</i> to make them slaves again	The Plagues. <i>Murder at the sea</i> , the deliverance.
Consequence on the Israelites	Oppression of the Israelites	Liberation of the Israelites

The image of God we get from the exodus story is that of one who takes a definite stand for and with his people. When his people are unreasonably oppressed, he does not want to remain indifferent. The suffering of his people becomes his own suffering. When Pharaoh let loose his oppressive measures against Israel, they could only cry to God. Their helplessness and tears made him intervene in their fate. God's mission of liberation began with the civil disobedience of the midwives and the daughter of Pharaoh. And these actions were only protective actions. They did not inflict any pain on Pharaoh or the Egyptians. When God threatened Egypt with the plagues, he allowed ample space for dialogue and negotiation. Every time Pharaoh gave Moses word that he would let the people go God removed the plague. But when Pharaoh's arrogance drove him to trail the Israelites, God had no choice but to respond. So Pharaoh and the Egyptians were not punished for

nothing. The following comparison explains how the disasters that Pharaoh and the Egyptians encountered correspond with those experiences by Israel at their hands.⁸

1. Prolonged oppression of the Egyptians via the plagues => unjust oppression of the Israelites over an extended period of time.
2. During the struggle the Egyptians lost their general well being, property, land, and life => Under the Egyptians the Israelites lost even their basic identity and right to live.
3. The deaths of Egyptian firstborns => the indiscriminate deaths experienced by Israelite babies at the hands of a Pharaoh bent on genocide.
4. The 'cry' of Egyptians on that fateful night (11:6; 12:30) => the 'cry' of the Israelites in bondage (3,7,9).

It is true that God judged against Egypt. But "such judgements are not imposed on the situation from without, but grow out of, have an intrinsic relationship to the sinful deed".⁹

The book of Exodus is a theological piece of literature. It conveys a firm faith conviction that the people of Israel did not come to be as a result of their own initiative, but by the gracious involvement of a powerful but merciful Mystery who worked within Israel's history, bringing it out of bondage and shaping it into a people for the Divine Self.¹⁰ It has played a major role in Jewish life throughout the ages. When the final redaction of the book of Exodus took place in the exilic and post-exilic period, Israel was a people who had lost its political and religious identity. The purpose of the story at this phase was to strengthen the people in their struggle for existence, keeping them hopeful. The God of Exodus, God who brought Israel out of Egypt, is presented as a

8. Fretheim deals with this correspondence thinking between deed and consequence which is prominent in Exodus more elaborately. See T.E. Fretheim, *The Plagues...*, 394.

9. *Ibid.*, 394.

10. See, R.J. Burns, *Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers*, 20.

symbol of hope to the people in exile. So the purpose of the biblical writers is not much to speak about the violence and vengeance of God but his benevolence. Later when Israel was exhorted to remember the exodus experience, it was this benevolence of God, his life-deal with his people, that was emphasized: "For I am the Lord who brought you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God; you shall therefore be holy, for I am holy" (Lev 11: 45); "The stranger who sojourns with you shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord" (Lev 19:34); "You shall have just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and a just hin: I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt" (Lev 19:36); "And if your brother becomes poor beside you, and sells himself to you, you shall not make him serve as a slave... For they are my servants, whom I brought forth out of the land of Egypt; they shall not be sold as slaves" (Lev 25:39-42).

God created humans in his image and likeness. He blessed them and said to them: "Be fruitful and multiply" (Gen 1:28). After the flood, when the new humanity began in Noah, God said the same blessing: "Be fruitful and multiply" (Gen 9:1). And to Abraham, the father of the nations, God restated the blessing: "I will multiply you exceedingly" (Gen 17:2) and "I will make you exceedingly fruitful" (Gen 17:6). When the new king of Egypt fearing the fruitfulness and increase of the Israelites ordered to destroy them, he was in fact acting against this creational purpose and divine mission. Violence in Exodus can be understood as the violation of this divine purpose. Pharaoh is a symbol of all who try to destroy this divine mission of life with death-projects. "God's work in and through Moses, climaxing in Israel's crossing of the sea on to 'dry land' constitutes God's efforts of recreation, to return creation to a point where God's mission can once again be taken up".¹¹

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11. T.E. Fretheim, *The Plagues...*, 392-93.

Violence in the Prophetic Books

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How do we make intelligible the frightening, destructive, and unrelenting anger of God expressed in violence to nations and to Israel in the prophetic writings? Does God confront violence within Israel with violence? On the one side, God's sovereignty is manifested in these acts, together with enormity of the sinfulness of Israel. The cultural categories have conditioned their narrations. Yet more, there is the picture of a God who is totally against violence, who even suffers violence as a servant! This is another inseparable side of the same picture.

Violence has been the stable food of most of us over these last few months with the bombing of September 11th, the Infada in Israel, the bombing of the Assembly in Srinagar and finally the attempts on our own Parliament. There have been many other stories of violence in these last months including the violent response to September 11th and Israel's spiraling of violence in the West Bank. The biblical story is realistic where we find violence on almost every other page. We will reflect on some aspects of violence in the prophets, an immense topic, which requires a book at least. We begin with two quotations.

And I said: Listen, you heads of Jacob and rulers of the house of Israel! Should you not know justice?— you who hate the good and love the evil, who tear the skin off my people, and the flesh off their bones; who eat the flesh of my people, flay their skin off them, break their bones in

pieces, and chop them up like meat in a kettle, like flesh in a caldron (Micah 3:1-3).

Ah, soiled, defiled, oppressing city! It has listened to no voice; it has accepted no correction. It has not trusted in the LORD; it has not drawn near to its God. The officials within it are roaring lions; its judges are evening wolves that leave nothing until the morning. Its prophets are reckless, faithless persons; its priests have profaned what is sacred, they have done violence to the law (Zephaniah 3:1-4).

These two texts illustrate what one author remarked about violence in the Bible: "The Bible exposed societal violence in a cosmology that instigates violence. More than 600 passages of human violence and some 1000 passages of divine violence occur in the OT. A violent God emerges as an irrational killer, a vengeance seeker, one who sanctions through human beings, and a retributive consequentialist, toward new communal peace and love".¹

In this contribution to the topic, which has such contemporary relevance, we shall explore the theme of violence in the prophets. We will restrict ourselves to the written prophets and to a selective treatment of the theme with an emphasis on providing much information.

Violence within Israel-Judah

We shall begin by bringing to mind the extent and nature of violence, which afflicted both the Northern and Southern kingdoms and was a major concern of most of the prophets. A classical term to describe this type of violence has become the name of a terrorist group in Palestine. The term is *chāmās* / *hamas* which means violence.² We read regularly of Hamas in the conflicts between Palestinians and Israelites today. Haag summarises the range of

1 Kirk-Duggan, C.A. *Violence* in Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible, Edited by David Noel Freedman, Grand Rapids, Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2000, 1357-8.

2 H Haag, *Chamas*, in TDOT, Edited by G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringier, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1980. Vol. IV, pp.478-87.

meanings in these terms: “thus chāmās is cold-blooded and unscrupulous infringement of the personal rights of others, motivated by greed and hate and often making use of physical violence and brutality.”³ There are a number of terms that recur in order to describe the pervading situations of oppression and violence of the more powerful and wealthy against the poor and powerless at the receiving end.

In different periods the situation is described in a general way in terms of widespread violence and in terms like oppression, devastation, wickedness. Amos describes the leaders as people who “do not know how to do right... those who store up violence and robbery in their strongholds” and who “bring near the reign of violence” (3:10; 6:3). Not long later Micah indicted the leaders of the capital saying: “Your wealthy are full of violence, your inhabitants speak lies, with tongues of deceit in their mouths” (Mic 6:12). Prior to the great exile the quality of life in Jerusalem is described vividly by three prophets. The effects of the reigns of Manasseh and Amon are that the rulers “fill the temple of their gods (or house of their master) with violence and fraud” (Zeph 1:9) while as the eventual first exile draws closer Habakkuk laments the enormous perversion of justice using many of the terms associated with violence:⁴

Lord how long shall I cry for help, and you will not listen?
Or cry to you “Violence!” and you will not save? Why do
you make me see wrongdoing and look at trouble?
Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention
arise. So the law becomes slack and justice never prevails.
The wicked surround the righteous— therefore judgment
comes forth perverted (Hab 1:2-4).

Jeremiah also witnesses to the violence which dominates life in Jerusalem. He describes it in these terms:

3 Ibid. 482.

4 Theodore Hiebert Habakkuk, in *The New Interpreter's Bible*. Nashville: Abingdom Press, 1996. Vol VII, p.630-31.

For thus says the Lord of hosts: Cut down her trees; cast up a siege ramp against Jerusalem. This is the city that must be punished; there is nothing but oppression within her. As a well keeps its water fresh, so she keeps fresh her wickedness; violence and destruction are heard within her; sickness and wounds are ever before me (6:6-7).

In his exile Ezekiel paints a horrible picture of the state of the country and its Jerusalem saying: "Make a chain! For the land is full of bloody crimes; the city is full of violence" (7:23). "To fill the land with violence" is a recurring description of the state of life just prior to the great exile (8:17; 12:19. Cf. 9:9). Ezekiel gathers together many types of violent oppression around the phrases "city of blood" and "city that pours out blood" (22:2-3; 6.9.12; 24:6.9).⁵ In this he echoes Isaiah more than a century earlier (Is 1:15.21). In the new polity there is to be an end to violence especially related to deprivation of the possession of land: "Thus says the Lord God: Enough, O princes of Israel! Put away violence and oppression, and do what is just and right. Cease your evictions of my people, says the Lord God" (45:9).

Though the people experience great hardships and despair of the exile yet those who returned and those who remained in the land created a similar situation of violence again after the exile in Jerusalem. The later Isaiah paints this picture of life:

Their works are works of iniquity, and deeds of violence are in their hands. Their feet run to evil, and they rush to shed innocent blood; their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity, desolation and destruction are in their highways (59:6).

His vision for the future contrasts with this situation: "Violence shall no more be heard in your land, devastation or destruction within your borders; you shall call your walls Salvation, and your gates Praise" (60:18).

5 Daniel I Block, *Lthe Book Of Ezekiel Chapters 1-14*, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans. 1997.pp 699-711

The Poor and Vulnerable

We shall give a more specific character to this general picture of violence and oppression. A way to enter into the world of oppression which must have in various ways characterized the monarchical government in the North and South for centuries is to look at two groups of people. The first consists of *'ebhyon*,⁶ *dal*,⁷ *'anî* and such terms used to describe the poor and weak. We shall quote at length from Fabry's comments on *dal* in Amos which gives us some idea of the oppression and violence these groups suffered. Amos also uses *dal* (Am 2:7; 4:1; 5:11; 8:6), *'ebhyon* (2:6; 4:1; 5:12; 8:4,6), and *'avan* (2:7; 8:4) synonymously. Undoubtedly *dal* in the time of Amos still includes those who have possessions, for grain (5:11) and wine (4:1; cf. Job 20:10) could be exacted from him. But more than ever in Amos *dal* is presented as a totally helpless person who has been handed over as defenseless to ... "those that trample" (2:7) to ... "those who oppress" (4:1), to ... "those that trample" (5:11 reading contested), and (like the *ebhyon*) to the slave dealers (8:6). It seems more likely that the background was an antisocial struggle by the owners of large landed estates, the stewards of the royal domains, to expand the size of their property. This struggle for expansion helps to explain the systematic way in which the rich proceeded against the small farmers; the exacting of exorbitant taxes (5:11), the blocking of lawsuits and claims for compensation by bribing judges and legal manoeuvring (2:6f....) and finally the buying up of their victims as slaves for paltry sum (8:6; cf. 2:6). According to Amos, enslavement for debt, which the ancient law provides for (Ex 21) is justified, but flagrant injustice is done when the *ebhyon*, "needy" is bought for a pair of sandals or the *dal*, "poor", for (an unstated amount of) silver (8:6; *tsaddiq*, 2:6). Amos sees in this whole system the evil that the "poor", weak, lowly, and

6 G.J. Botterweck, *'bhyon* in TDOT, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1977. Vol 1, pp.27-41, especially 31-34.

7 H.-J. Fabry, *dal* TDOT Vol III, 1978, pp.208-230, especially 222-228.

innocent are made the object of mercantile calculations of the “early capitalistic” upper class.⁸

Slavery as a payment for debts was one form of this violence and Botterweck comments on this. “The protection of the ‘poor’ from perversion of justice and from exploitation is a major theme in the prophecy of Amos: he uses *’ebhyon* (2:6; 4:1; 5:12; 8:4.6), *dal* (2:7; 4:1; 5:11; 8:6) and *anavim* (2:7; 8:4). People afflicted the righteous (*tsaddiq*), take a bribe or hush-money, and oppress the needy (*ebhoyim*) in the judicial process in the gate (5:12); because of the corruption of the judges, the innocent are pronounced guilty and needy are deprived of their rights”.⁹

As this happened in the middle of the eighth century in the North similar actions happened in the South in the time of Isaiah (3:15; 10:2; 32:7) and Jeremiah (2:34; 5:28; 22:16) and Ezekiel who see oppression of the weak as typical of the violent son (18:12.17) and a horrible reality in the city (22:29).¹⁰ The king like God is to be the advocate and protector of these groups.¹¹ The psalms remind us how common, persistent and widespread were forms of violent social oppression. It needs to be remarked that many of the prophets do not highlight these aspects like Amos and Micah.

The Widow, Orphan and Alien

The other group of people who were vulnerable and the violence they suffered against which the prophet spoke out clearly are the widow, the orphan and the alien dwelling in the land often clubbed together. Isaiah (Is 1:16-17. 23; 10:2), Jeremiah (5:28; 7:6; 22:3), Ezekiel (22:7) and much later Zechariah (7:9-10) underline either the gross oppression of these groups or that their protection is a key aspect of covenant life.¹²

8. Fabry, 222-223.

9. Botterweck, 31.

10. Ibid. 33.

11. Ibid. 33-34.

12. H. Ringgren, *y^aḏŪm TDOT*, Vol VI, p.481.

The Areas of Life and Violence

The areas in which violence is practiced is at the gates (courts), the appropriation of land and houses (Mic 2:1-2.9; Is 5:8; Ezek 45:9; 46:18 and new polity), debts leading to unjust and unjustified slavery (Amos), unjust trading practices (Mic 6: 10-12), extortion (Ezek 22:12-13) and robbery (Ezek 18:), sexual exploitation (Ezek 22:20-11) and murder (Mic 7::2; Jer 2:34; 19:4; Is 1:15.21; 5:7; Ezek 22:3-13). A horrible picture of violent behaviour violating so many rights of others we find vividly expressed by Ezekiel when he describes the violent son and his opposite (18: 20-13 and 5-8.14=17).

Idolatry as Adultery

I wondered whether we could also consider the persistent and widespread worship of other gods, the gods of fertility to a very large extent, as acts of violence towards God. That the prophets clearly link idolatry and social injustice is clear. However we could see the infidelity of Israel and the rupture of the basic relationship with the Lord as their God as a quiet type of violence. The response of God as described in the oracles of judgement is consistently most violent and this is illustrated in most of the prophets and in a special way in Hosea and Ezekiel. Both the end of the Northern Kingdom and the great exile of Judah are ultimately the fruit of idolatry. One of Ezekiel's favourite epithets for the nation is "rebellious house" (2:1-8). The constant use of "whore" and adultery as the images of this cultic and religious infidelity carries with it the sense of violent abuse of another person, a violation of the relationship and duties (Hos 4:4-19). The graphic and terrible stories of the nation told in terms of adulterously unfaithful women by Ezekiel support the claim that idolatry was a violent state of life. Ezekiel makes a specific link with the bloodshed of human sacrifice

Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Because you have forgotten me and cast me behind your back, therefore bear the consequences of your lewdness and whorings. The

LORD said to me: Mortal, will you judge Oholah and Oholibah? Then declare to them their abominable deeds. For they have committed adultery, and blood is on their hands; with their idols they have committed adultery; and they have even offered up to them for food the children whom they had borne to me. Moreover this they have done to me: they have defiled my sanctuary on the same day and profaned my sabbaths. For when they had slaughtered their children for their idols, on the same day they came into my sanctuary to profane it. This is what they did in my house (23:36-39).

International Violence

This takes place mainly within the context of war. The classical texts are in Amos 1:2-2:3. The prophet forcefully paints a picture of the violation of human rights. The brutality of war is described in imagery like “thresh with threshing sledges of iron (1:3) and ripping open pregnant women (1:13). They are accused of enslaving the conquered (1:6.9) and continuous violent attitude to another nation (21:11). When we look into the many oracles against the nations we do not find detailed descriptions of their violence. Babylon is described as the “destroying mountain destroying the whole earth (Jer 51:25), the hammer of the whole earth (Jer 50:23) which oppresses God’s people and plunders them (Jer 50:34.37). A type of summary description would be:

“King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon has devoured me, he has crushed me; he has made me an empty vessel, he has swallowed me like a monster; he has filled his belly with my delicacies, he has spewed me out. May my torn flesh be avenged on Babylon”, the inhabitants of Zion shall say. “May my blood be avenged on the inhabitants of Chaldea”, Jerusalem shall say (Jer 51:34-35).

The Violence of God

This leads us to a major area. We could use the heading *The*

Violent God or *The Violence of God*. The violence attributed to God in the prophets overwhelms any reader. The prophets contain so many oracles of judgement and any reader paying attention to the image of God being painted by them will be shocked.

Oracles against the Nations

In the many oracles against the nations (Isaiah 13-23, Jeremiah 46-51, Ezekiel 25-31, Obadiah, Nahum, Habakkuk,...) we hardly hear a word which is not indicating destruction and devastation of land and people, young and old, children and animals. It is rare that we see anything but the furious face and hear the bitter and harsh words of judgment.

The violence comes to expression in the oracles about the nations chosen by God as his instruments of harsh and at times unremitting punishment on Israel and especially Judah (Is 5:25-30; 7:18-20; 8:7-8; 10:5-6; Jer 32; Hab 1:5-11...). We quote one text where Jeremiah possibly refers to Cyrus whom Isaiah will call God's anointed (45:1) while later Jeremiah calls Nebuchadnezzar his servant (Jer 27:6) and Babylon is the nation chosen to be the cup of God's wrath on the nations (Jer 25:15-29. Jeremiah writes:

You are my war club, my weapon of battle: with you I smash nations; with you I destroy kingdoms; with you I smash the horse and its rider; with you I smash the chariot and the charioteer; with you I smash man and woman; with you I smash the old man and the boy; with you I smash the young man and the girl; with you I smash shepherds and their flocks; with you I smash farmers and their teams; with you I smash governors and deputies (51:20-23).

We note the repetition of the "I" and the impression of destructive power of God channeled through a human figure or maybe a nation.¹³ The descriptions of God's destructive wrath, the warrior

13 K.M. O'Connor Jeremiah in *The Oxford Bible Commentary*, Edited by John Barton and John Muddiman, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001., p.525

God are horrible. In the oracles against the nations we find texts like one where God is described as a sacrificial priest:

When my sword has drunk its fill in the heavens, lo, it will descend upon Edom, upon the people I have doomed to judgment. The LORD has a sword; it is sated with blood, it is gorged with fat, with the blood of lambs and goats, with the fat of the kidneys of rams. For the LORD has a sacrifice in Bozrah, a great slaughter in the land of Edom. Wild oxen shall fall with them, and young steers with the mighty bulls. Their land shall be soaked with blood, and their soil made rich with fat (Is 34:5-7).

In another text God's anger is portrayed with various violent images:

See, the name of the LORD comes from far away, burning with his anger, and in thick rising smoke; his lips are full of indignation, and his tongue is like a devouring fire; his breath is like an overflowing stream that reaches up to the neck- to sift the nations with the sieve of destruction, and to place on the jaws of the peoples a bridle that leads them astray (Is 30:27-28).

Divine Violence on Israel

It is not only with the nations that God's anger finds such vivid and horrible expression. To the chosen people also this anger bursts out in all types of violent ways. The prophets are filled with oracles of judgement. They are presented often as violent men by their very divine vocation, reflecting the violent intention of God.

Hosea can guide us to see that the prophets were in many ways violent figures. He describes their mission: "Therefore I have hewn them by the prophets, I have killed them by the words of my mouth, and my judgment goes forth as the light" (6:5). The classical example is the very vocation of Jeremiah

See, today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow,

to build and to plant... But you, gird up your loins; stand up and tell them everything that I command you. Do not break down before them, or I will break you before them. And I for my part have made you today a fortified city, an iron pillar, and a bronze wall, against the whole land— against the kings of Judah, its princes, its priests, and the people of the land. They will fight against you; but they shall not prevail against you, for I am with you, says the LORD, to deliver you (1:10.17-19).

Isaiah's mission is to be unsuccessful as the people do not repent and destruction is as it were foreordained (6:10-13).

God speaks through his prophets and acts through so many instruments. Consistently the prophets emphasise the enormous power of God as the creator.¹⁴

This is the plan that is planned concerning the whole earth; and this is the hand that is stretched out over all the nations. For the LORD of hosts has planned, and who will annul it? His hand is stretched out, and who will turn it back? (Is 14:26-27; Cc. Amos 34:12-13).

Therefore drought, famine and disease (Am 4:6-11) are his weapons which he uses so regularly to punish his people. His favoured weapon is the sword, image of war. The image is used so often by various prophets. God emerges as a terrifying and merciless military warlord brandishing the sword glutted with blood. We will just quote the horrific poem of the sword of God:

Mortal, prophesy and say: Thus says the Lord; Say: A sword, a sword is sharpened, it is also polished; it is sharpened for slaughter, honed to flash like lightning! How can we make merry? You have despised the rod, and all discipline. The sword is given to be polished, to be grasped in the hand; it is sharpened, the sword is polished, to be placed in the

14 Through out the essay we are forced to just give one or other example. The material is so vast and so rich and repetitive.

slayer's hand. Cry and wail, O mortal, for it is against my people; it is against all Israel's princes; they are thrown to the sword, together with my people. Ah! Strike the thigh! For consider: What! If you despise the rod, will it not happen? Says the Lord GOD. And you, mortal, prophesy; strike hand to hand. Let the sword fall twice, thrice; it is a sword for killing. A sword for great slaughter—it surrounds them; therefore hearts melt and many stumble. At all their gates I have set the point of the sword. Ah! It is made for flashing, it is polished for slaughter. Attack to the right! Engage to the left!—wherever your edge is directed. I too will strike hand to hand, I will satisfy my fury; I the LORD have spoken (21:9-17).

The constant attribution of war, horrible and merciless destruction by the super powers of the various periods must shock and more so today when we find super powers playing God in our own world. The typical oracles of judgement describe the evil of Israel and then the consequences with the often famous “therefore says the Lord” and similar formula. So often the punishment fits the crime. At times the prophet adds that repentance, prayer of the prophet, cries of the people will not deter God's anger. There are so many oracles to choose some illustrations, which will give the sense of God's violence, is not easy.

Yet I have been the LORD your God ever since the land of Egypt; you know no God but me, and besides me there is no savior. It was I who fed you in the wilderness, in the land of drought. When I fed them, they were satisfied; they were satisfied, and their heart was proud; therefore they forgot me. So I will become like a lion to them, like a leopard I will lurk beside the way. I will fall upon them like a bear robbed of her cubs, and will tear open the covering of their heart; there I will devour them like a lion, as a wild animal would mangle them. I will destroy you, O Israel; who can help you? Where now is your king, that he may save you?

Where in all your cities are your rulers, of whom you said, "Give me a king and rulers"? I gave you a king in my anger, and I took him away in my wrath. Ephraim's iniquity is bound up; his sin is kept in store. The pangs of childbirth come for him, but he is an unwise son; for at the proper time he does not present himself at the mouth of the womb. Shall I ransom them from the power of Sheol? Shall I redeem them from Death? O Death, where are your plagues? O Sheol, where is your destruction? Compassion is hidden from my eyes. Although he may flourish among rushes, the east wind shall come, a blast from the LORD, rising from the wilderness; and his fountain shall dry up, and his spring shall be parched. It shall strip his treasury of every precious thing. Samaria shall bear her guilt, because she has rebelled against her God; they shall fall by the sword, their little ones shall be dashed in pieces, and their pregnant women ripped open (Hosea 13:4-16).

The words of God are horrible. The worst crimes of military conflict are sanctioned and compassion is a dead reality. There seems to be a tone of arrogant boasting. We also note the reference to the great narratives of God's past saving deeds. The God of Amos is not less unbending and the same is true of all the prophets. Amos's God has fixed his eyes on them for harm and not for good!!

I saw the LORD standing beside the altar, and he said: Strike the capitals until the thresholds shake, and shatter them on the heads of all the people; and those who are left I will kill with the sword; not one of them shall flee away, not one of them shall escape. Though they dig into Sheol, from there shall my hand take them; though they climb up to heaven, from there I will bring them down. Though they hide themselves on the top of Carmel, from there I will search out and take them; and though they hide from my sight at the bottom of the sea, there I will command the sea-serpent, and it shall bite them. And though they go into captivity in

front of their enemies, there I will command the sword, and it shall kill them; and I will fix my eyes on them for harm and not for good (Amos 9:1-4).

The Day of the Lord

Finally we could take one description of *the day of the lord*. This phrase is only used sixteen times yet there are many other similar expressions like “the day of the Lord’s wrath (Ezek 7:9; Is 2:12), “on that day” (Zeph 1:9-10; Am 8:9). We shall quote a rich summary of this reality, which in various ways dominates so much of prophetic teaching and is intimately related to the violence of God:

The day of the Lord brings the outpouring of Yahweh’s punishment on Israel and Judah. Amos 5:18-20, probably the earliest reference, proclaims judgment on Israel and implies that the prophet overturns the people’s expectation of what will happen. The convenient people, who expect God to intervene to defeat their enemies, are instead lurching towards judgment. According to the prophets this divine judgment is not arbitrary but is prompted by idolatry (Isa 2:8,20; Zeph 1:4-6), pride and arrogance (Isa 2:11,17), and a lack of social justice (Amos 2:6-7; Zeph 3:1-3). It is a purging judgment, which cleanses the blot of wickedness from among God’s chosen nation. Unrelenting and inescapable (Amos 5:18-19; Zeph 1:12), it specifically targets the nation’s leaders (Isa 3:1-2; Zeph 3:2-3). Although the punishment will come in the form of military defeat (Amos 2:13-16; Zeph 1:16), it is clear that Yahweh is the driving force behind it (note the 1st person verbs in Amos 8:9-11; Zeph 1:8,9,11; Cf. Joel 2:11).¹⁵

Is the Violence of God Intelligible?

How do we make intelligible this frightening, destructive, violent and unrelenting anger of God? There are a number of points.

15 G.A. King, *Day of the Lord* in Dictionary of the Bible, pp.324-325.

First the richness and extraordinary character of God's blessings on his people and all people is the other side of the coin. You cannot have one without the other in the biblical way of conceiving God who is sovereign of all history, all people and the cosmos. God is conceived in many texts like a sovereign and there is a relationship of dependence between the sovereign Lord and all creation and in a special way his people. Many texts narrate in summary form the creative and saving acts of God for his people. Within the culture the portrayal of God shares in aspects of that world. So disobedience and revolt are punished as obedience is rewarded. Also the writers seek ways to underline as forcefully as possible the enormity of human sin and its destructive nature. The writers see the consequences of sin played out in history and the signs of these are invasions, natural calamities and various forms of destruction. They attribute all this to the action and intent of the sovereign Lord. The covenant is at the background and all its implications. There is also that cultural image of the betrayed husband and his utterly unfaithful wife, so vivid in Ezekiel and Hosea and Isaiah 54:1-10 and yet recurring in many texts. In this culturally conditioned background we can also understand the violence of the actions of God. We also note again that the violence is matched by a type of shocking forgiveness as Jeremiah indicates in his words about the horror of a man receiving back his unfaithful wife (Jer 3:1-4).¹⁶ This world of imagery enables us to note a major point. The violence is balanced by the unexpected and unparalleled mercy. One cannot be without the other. More reflection is needed on this point.

The Other Face of God

However what is of greatest importance in the consideration of God's violence or the violent God is both the final purpose of punishment and the great story of God's fidelity, mercy, his

16 We are aware of the danger of this imagery in its portrayal of woman and the patriarchal background involved.

vulnerability, his loving kindness which come to expression in forgiveness, transformation and restoration. The dry bones narrative of Ezekiel, the pain of God in Hosea, the ways in which Amos (9:11-15), Micah (4:1-4; 5:1-5; 7:18-20), and Hosea (14:1-8) fuse judgment with promise are some of the signs of this. Hosea leaves his reader with the image of God as “the evergreen cypress” (14:8). Jeremiah will place the new covenant before the people while Ezekiel will describe at length the return of God to the Temple and restoration. Then the promises of the ideal King (Is 9 and 11), God himself as the new shepherd (Ezek 34:11-16) and the rebuilding of Zion force readers to look again at the violent God. What we must avoid is to see the promise of mercy and restoration like food parcels, such as were recently showered upon the Afghan people with enormous bombing.

Micah allows the people themselves to speak about their experience of God, the pain and yet their trust which is so profound:

Do not rejoice over me, O my enemy; when I fall, I shall rise; when I sit in darkness, the LORD will be a light to me. I must bear the indignation of the LORD, because I have sinned against him, until he takes my side and executes judgment for me. He will bring me out to the light; I shall see his vindication. Then my enemy will see, and shame will cover her who said to me, “Where is the LORD your God?” My eyes will see her downfall; now she will be trodden down like the mire of the streets. Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over the transgression of the remnant of your possession? He does not retain his anger forever, because he delights in showing clemency. He will again have compassion upon us; he will tread our iniquities under foot. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea. You will show faithfulness to Jacob and unswerving loyalty to Abraham, as you have sworn to our ancestors from the days of old (Micah 7:8-10.18-19).

The text would lead us to many other texts and the poignant words of Hosea’s God to Ephraim his son come to mind

How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, O Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I treat you like Zeboiim? My heart recoils within me; my compassion grows warm and tender. I will not execute my fierce anger; I will not again destroy Ephraim; for I am God and no mortal, the Holy One in your midst, and I will not come in wrath (Hosea 11:8-9).

We can place with this picture the abused husband who will take his unfaithful wife into the desert to begin all over again (Hosea 2:16-23) and the final words of God promising an everlasting covenant at the end of the story of the wife so different to the ending of the story of the two sisters (Ezek 16:59-63 but in contrast to 23:46-49).

These and similar texts lead us to the picture of the servant who has done no violence and yet becomes the willing victim of such violence:

By a perversion of justice he was taken away. Who could have imagined his future? For he was cut off from the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people. They made his grave with the wicked and his tomb with the rich, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth. (Is 53:8-9)

The promised king or new shepherds are to inaugurate a great period of social justice, fidelity in worship and peace which embraces the human family, nature and the cosmos. This is God's deepest desire. However violence is so often the human reality. As the biblical story unfolds the anguish of God comes to expression in mercy and forgiveness, a recreative loving fidelity. However we learn in Jesus Christ and from gazing at him crucified that the Father is not a violent God but a God of such vulnerability and one who swallows as it were the violence of our history in his Son and in his re-creative love.

Jesus and Violence

Augustine Mulloor

Jesus is the final climatic moment of the evolution of salvation history which may be identified as the evolution from violence to non-violence, resulting from the evolution from polytheism to monotheism. How Jesus taught and lived perfect and all-embracing non-violence? Jesus' teaching and example shows that old patterns are to be abandoned and this new pattern is to be followed. The article presents Jesus from this perspective.

Introduction

Jesus represents a radical pattern shift in the understanding of violence in the salvation History. Jesus' teaching and life made earlier patterns of the Old Testament obsolete and outdated. In the light of the 2nd Testament, the First Testament and its patterns require reinterpretation in terms of earlier stages and progressive moments of an evolution. The progressive process is from the understanding of God as violent to God as non-violent.

In this study, we shall trace back the most important traits of this universal pattern regarding non violence as identified with Jesus. We shall begin with a reflection on the background of violence from which Jesus teaching and example emerge in a better focus.

Background of violence and the uniqueness of Jesus

One of the major reactions to the colonial exploitative situation of Palestine, was that of violence. In different measures all the

reactions to colonialism, namely communalism, fundamentalism, injustice, corruption, fanatic interpretation of religion, extreme legalism and discriminations imply violence either on physical or on ideological level. Physical violence was promoted by zealots. Ideological violence was advocated by different groups and sects, especially pharisees and scribes.

Jesus had no slant on any of these various streams of reactions. The uniqueness of Jesus is evident exactly in this that he is totally against violence in any form either physical or ideological - this will be clarified in the course of this article.

The movement or evolution of nonviolence is the result of the evolution of the concept of God. With the conception of God as the universal Father, there is the value of fraternity which could not be marginalized. It is really the result of the evolution from polytheism to monotheism. When God is individualistically conceived and exclusive relationships are promoted, there will be necessarily, the outsider - insider feeling too. This can lead to scape goat psychology according to which an outsider may be identified as a block to one's progress and his elimination or removal will be seen as the solution. This solution can be executed only through violence exercised with the help of power. Most of the OT narration of violence can be interpreted understandably in the light of this principle.

If so, the revolutionary turning point in Jesus is the revelation of God as "One" (monotheism) and his nature as that of Father. Inclusive vision of a community, fraternal relationships of love and tolerance of each other are the results. Nobody is a block to me, no one a threat, but everyone smoothens and facilitates my growth and progress. One would not require at all violent elimination of anyone for a dynamic progress, development and fulfilments. This is paramount in touching the depth dimension and thus finding the fundamental to communism that bridges all separating gulfs and alienating gaps.

The revelation of God as the sole point of reference demanding

the conformity of total life to it makes it possible to transcend the frontiers and boundaries instead of destroying them and thus yielding to violence. Frontiers are real even between members of the same family. Desire for uniformity on the external level will only promote violation of boundaries. Unity instead will make it possible to respect the boundaries and yet go beyond them.

Jesus lived this principle to the full and became a living example: and thus the turning point in the salvation history.

Reconciliation versus Violence (Mt 5: 21-48)

Jesus' radical option for non violence is seen in the reinterpretation of the law through its interiorization, radicalization and spiritualization through antitheses. They are expressions of a radical understanding of non-violence because the demand of Jesus regarding murder, adultery, oath, divorce, retaliation and enmity is to undergo an interior silent revolution by eradicating not only external acts but also and above all the very spirit of any shadow of violence from the heart. This is the core of a paradigm shift made possible through the teaching of Jesus.

Murder is violence in its naked form. But its origin is in the heart of a person. The violation of another's life-frontiers starts in the experience of anger and ill feeling. Anger in the heart is the seed form of murder. So to stop murder and thus to uproot external violence, a transformation at the heart-level in favour of radical reconciliation is necessary.

Adultery is violence done to a person and to a family. It destroys the values of communion, love and sharing on the basis of a commitment. But physical distance between a man and a woman cannot guarantee the eradication of adultery. Adultery is more an exercise of interior violence to another person through yielding to desire. A superficial removal of violence can be no solution. Hence violence through adultery can stop only when we fill the hearts with pure desire.

Divorcee is yet another form of violence. When marriage commitment is seen as an inclusive relationship, a violent act of

separation can be avoided. For this God has to be brought into this relationship. This requires an interior revolution.

Taking oath to prove the truthfulness of something is again an expression of violence. Only by bringing transparency and authenticity in one's heart and life this kind of violence can be stopped. For this one has to be God centered above all.

Retaliation is an old pattern for bringing justice to realization. But in actuality it only promotes and nurtures further violence. To have the courage and capacity of tolerance and patience, one needs universal inclusive heart that can accept even the violence in a non violent way.

Finally, hatred for enemies in contrast to love for neighbour is discriminatory and separatist attitude catalysing violence. The internal revolution required is the experience of love which is divine and all sufficing so that even an enemy is seen as insider and not as an outsider. Therefore forgiveness, love and reconciliation become the media for relationship.

Finally, in 5:48, the basis and source of such an interior and silent revolution is crystallized: "Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect". Perfection of the Father is the positive model for the life and promotion of non violence. The perfection of the Father is the perfection of being, namely, love which does not discriminate and separate by making the sun rise on the good and bad people equally and make the rain fall on the just and unjust equally. It is a perfection of love that gives and does not desire to receive, so that in its ultimate expression it becomes all embracing and universal. In the family under the fatherhood of God no one is a block or scape-got.

This is the synthesis of the new law, the law of love in its perfection as is found in God, the Father himself.

"Do not judge" (Mt 7:1-5)

The last part of the Sermon on the Mt. presents the new attitudes which the new Israel with the true righteousness has to live: "Do

not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth”; “Do not serve two masters”; “Do not be anxious”; “Do not give to dogs what is holy”; “Do not judge”.

When one judges others, violence is implied at the interior level. There is the attitude of self righteousness, working as a presupposition in the judgment of another. It means that one does not include him/her in God who alone knows the innermost intentions of a person. Our judgments can be misjudgments and hence violation of the sincerity and purity of the interiority of another. Such violence can be removed only through the capacity to see everyone as God sees. God-centeredness is the means for adopting values.

“Let both of them grow together” (Mt 13: 24-30)

The parable of the weeds is a special tradition of Matthew. Matthew is addressing the narration of the story of Jesus to a community that is divided by self complacency in the name of traditions and origins, discriminations and separatist feeling and intolerance. The so called “holy” members could not bear or tolerate the presence of less holy and impure persons in the community. They would demand an immediate radical purification in order to make the community an idealistic one. This is the *Sitz im Leben* in which the parable of the weeds is presented.

The servants who advocate, rightly indeed according to the rule of agriculture, the immediate removal of weeds from the fields are, paradoxically prohibited by the master. “No”, he says, “let them grow together until harvest.”

It has been always difficult to understand this attitude of the owner of the field because the over enthusiasm for renewal can look at it only as a compromise leading to destruction. But it is this strange prohibition and the consequent shock experienced by the reader/listener that is the real point of the parable. That the owner of the field is different from others makes the difference between Jesus and others or the God revealed therein.

Immediate intervention in the field would be a violent reaction creating chaos and confusion. But letting the weeds grow is not equalizing them with wheat plants either. The harvest is sure and then there is no compromise. A strict adherence to principles should be proportionately combined with the understanding and tolerance emerging from basic non violence within.

“Blessed are those who are persecuted” (Mt 5: 1-12)

The beatitudes are the crystallisation of the message of Jesus. It is the magna Carta of Christian revolution. But some one may ask, how could there be a revelation when the poor, the mourning, the meek, the unjustly treated, downtrodden, marginalized and persecuted ones are declared ‘Blessed’?

The revolution is always read as violent and external. If such a revolution could have changed the situation in the world, the world would have been all different. Jesus opts for a non-violent, radical and silent revolution within the hearts. Which alone can transform the situation of the world of poverty, injustice, corruption, persecution and inhuman misery.

The first step in this is to recognize, in the very suffering of persecution, poverty and injustice, the presence of God who stands by, supporting, not leaving us alone. This experience brings joy in spite of and in the midst of all this terrible agonizing situation. Then from there, there is a journey towards a new transformed world together with this God, depending on his grace totally. It is this god-centered revolutionary and transformative process demanding love and non violence in the heart that will change the situation of the world. The dynamism that is demanded by this is spiritual, interior, lasting and creatively powerful but not popular spectacular and external.

“Get behind me, Satan !” (Mk 8: 31-33)

According to Mark, Jesus introduced the theme of passion in his teachings to the disciples in the second part of his ministry. The first reactions of the disciples represented by Peter is negative

because to understand passion as a necessary or essential aspect of messiahship is difficult. Jesus response to Peter's reaction reveals the meaning of non-violence implied in the message.

Resistance to suffering is considered satanic and this is equal to opposing God himself. Non violent acceptance of suffering is presented as ideal. The suffering referred to is the result of altruistic options made in favour of justice, love and peace and understood as a mystery to be embraced in faith and experienced as communion. The violent reaction would demand the analysis of the same in terms of problem so that solution can be formed. In reality such an approach does not bring solution but only violence and resultant restlessness. Whereas non-violent and passive acceptance of suffering brings joy, peace, quietness and communion.

Jesus' suffering and death

In the passion narratives of the gospels one background imagery common to all is that of the suffering servant based on the songs of Isaiah. The servant is one who has voluntarily taken upon himself the suffering and death for the salvation of the people. He is a non-violent and gentle servant who "will not cry or lift up his voice or make it heard in the street. Who will not break a bruised breed, quench a dimly burning wick..." (Is 42:2-3)// (Mt. 12:15-21). "Who gave his back to those who struck him, his cheeks to those who pulled out the beard; did not hide his face from insult and spitting (Is 50:5-6); " who poured out himself to death and was numbered with transgressors, who bore the sin of many and made intercession for the transgressors" (Is 53:12).

The arrest of Jesus did not take place with a violent resistance. Jesus prohibited those who tried to defend him (In 18:10-11). He offered himself voluntarily and willingly into the hands of the enemies. This is emphasized especially by John (18: 1-11). To this end, contributors repeated the phrase in the further gospel: "they could not arrest him" because his hour had not yet come (Jn 7:44; 8:59, 10:39). Jesus' death is not the result of mob violence but of his willing self-offering (Jn 10:18).

The silence of Jesus during the trial (Mk 14:51-62), his not responding to the challenges of the Jewish leaders, soldiers, and the thief (Lk 23: 34-46), his forgiving the enemies (Lk 23:34) and surrender to the Father in death are expressions of non violent acceptance of suffering. In contrast to the power manifested in the inflicting of passion and death rule on Jesus, Jesus not responding in violence releases inexhaustive energy of the spirit to the world.

“I came not to bring peace” (Mt 10: 34; Lk 12: 51-53)

At a particular moment Jesus says that he came not to bring peace, but division, or sword; These words have nothing to do with violence but with the crucial and decisive salvific significance of the person of Jesus. The incomparable and unique nature of Jesus and his mission will automatically create disturbances in the lives leading to authentic decisions and attitudes centered on nonviolence.

“Let him sell the mantle and buy a sword” (Lk 22: 35-38)

The saying is part of the eschatological discourse of Jesus in Luke. Naturally, the context is the death of Jesus which is the anticipation of the final events. The time is crucial and urgent demanding an immediate decision. Everything else would be secondary in comparison with this. That is why, what is normally, important, like a mantle, is to be sold in order to buy a “sword” which is the symbol of the salvific intervention of God that really cuts us.

“The violent take it by force” (Mt 11:12)

This is a text that has been misinterpreted by some as the basis for the defence of violence in Jesus’ teaching. This sentence is the second part of another sentence which also implies violence: “From the time of John until now, kingdom of God suffers violence”. The meaning is that there is violent opposition both ideological (Pharisees’ and Galilean cities’ rejection of Jesus) and physical (arrest of John) to the Kingdom of God. If so who are “the violent men” who take it by force? Lk has made it understandable by

omitting the first part of the sentence especially the verb “do violence” and speaking of evangelization and thus making the second part too positive in terms of violence done to oneself to enter the kingdom of God (Lk 16:16). Being a “crux interpretum” the Matthean text does not seem to yield to that meaning in positive terms but refers to the violence done to the kingdom by some. So Jesus is not advocating violence as a means to enter the kingdom but is articulating the reality of the opposition to kingdom.

**“Take these things away” (Jn 2: 13-25;
Mk 11:1-11 and parallels)**

The action and teaching of Jesus in the Jerusalem temple is apparently a scene of violence, especially in Johannine tradition. This is because of the literal interpretation of the narration: What is intended by the narration is a prophetic symbolic action in the line of the action of Jeremiah in the temple as narrated in Jer 7: If. Jesus is impelled by the prophetic zeal for the house of God and compelled by its desecrated status defeating the very purpose. So it would be wrong to understand this as a proof for legitimacy of violence.

Conclusion

To summarise our reflection on Jesus and violence,

- The background of violence at the time of Jesus highlights the uniqueness of Jesus’ reaction through non violence. Jesus is the perfect model of the new pattern, at the end of the evolutionary movement from violence to non violence.
- Jesus’ teaching on reconciliation against violence pervades not merely physical and external level but also and especially the internal and heart level as articulated in the antitheses.
- Interior non-violence includes the capacity to view everyone as seen by God and thus to suspend all judgements.
- It demands radical tolerance in letting the good and evil to grow together yet without compromising.

- Beatitudes are not meant to be source of passivity and inertia but a dynamic point of departure for revolutionary transformation of society with the power of God.
- Non-violent acceptance of suffering for the sake of others alone will produce peace, joy and communion.
- The source of spiritual energy that can change the world is such suffering and death as lived by Jesus, fulfilling in himself the ideal of the suffering servant.
- On this basis, all the teachings and action of Jesus which imply violence are really not advocating violence when interpreted in the right perspective.
- Ultimately, Jesus taught and lived that authentic interiority totally free from hatred and violence, possible only through the experience of and commitment to God, the only God and the Father of all, so that all will be seen and treated as insiders of the same family and not as obstacles on the way to be eliminated through violence. This alone will stop violation of boundaries and promote transcendence of frontiers leading to communion

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Book Reviews

HINDU VIEW OF LIFE: A CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVE,
M. Sivaramkrishna, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2001
pp.184; Rs.150.00

The book is the fifth in "Dharma Endowment Lectures" of Dharmaram Vidyakshetra of Bangalore. Departing from the traditional systematic Hindu approach to life and reality through various concepts and patterns as seen in the Upanishads and the Six Systems, Professor Sivaramakrishna presents a "contemporary" approach based on the teaching of his guru Sri Ram that "the truths found locked up in books are in fact, live centers of cosmic consciousness". According to this perspective, the specific Hindu view on humans' embodied existence and on the world around them is a belief system that included faith in fate steered by one's own actions, an inherent and inborn faith in the unity of life, a generous and tolerant rapport with other ideologies.

Accordingly he starts reinterpreting the four-limbed traditional methodology or *sadhana catustaya*: *Adhikara* is not the psychological competence of the inquirer, as traditionally understood, but "faith in the possibility of ordering the rhythms of life in such a way that one balances *para* and *apara* domains of knowledge." *Sambandha* or connection is not the relation between experience and expression, but rather "the protean forms, frames and fashions in academic and intellectual fields that any study has to reckon with". *Vishaya* or object is not any stable reality symbolized by Sanskrit, but "a perennial process of recovery, a process rooted in the multitude of cultural patterns indicated by switch over to English. *Phalasruti*, or final goal is not realization

of the really Real, but “literally listening to gains of an expository exercise”, which surely is more exciting.

The second chapter of the book discusses the religious situation in India today. It is that the quest for a deeper understanding has destroyed the distinction among religions. He quotes Raimundo Panikkar: “On the intellectual plane, no religion can pride itself on having fully revealed the mystery of reality on the existential plane.” Hinduism is no longer amenable to description which stem from classical or ‘foundational text’. Along with Buddhism, Islam and Christianity, Hinduism experienced nearly radical changes ... through which these religions felt the impact of ‘modernity’. There is sustained inter-religious appropriation. Even in understanding religious texts and Christ himself it is said that we ourselves and our sensitivity are primary, that they are meant for our becoming higher than we are!

The third chapter is an enumeration of the many ways in which Hindu religion and Hindu texts have been misunderstood and misinterpreted especially by people from outside the tradition. The conclusion is “that the contemporary appropriation of the Hindu way of life is far too complex to be buckled within the belt of any one ideology or approach as inclusive of all” (p.100). The fourth chapter discusses religious pluralism. There are two main Hindu approaches “One is the mystical/spiritual approach wherein the experience of the sages and saints affirms the essential unity of religions” (p.101). The other is “the reverence and exploration of the faith of the other and then, if need be, absorbing it without on the way getting dispossessed or denuded of anything that one is familiar with”. Secularism that reduces religion to a private matter and makes public life controlled solely by sociology and politics does not do justice to reality. “Religions are very strong modes of perception in India and they inform several civil issues” (p.126). Conflicts do exist. “They can only be neutralized, but never totally annihilated. Pluralism and fundamentalism constitute together the

truth of the eternal drama of good and not so good that goes on”(p. 128).

The fifth chapter which studies the feminist problem has very little that is uniquely Hindu to present. “The tremendous psychological and spiritual implications of woman as a goddess and the goddess as a woman is unique residue that is steadily surfacing in contemporary studies” both in the West and the East. Similarly the economics of globalization, ecology and social justice studied in chapter 6, touch a global problem. Though India has the social ideal of *vasudhaika kudumbakam* the vision of humanity as one family, its view is mostly fatalistic, namely that the widespread poverty and squalor created by global programmes of development are inevitable as a ‘cosmic autumn.’!

The book is typical of the attitude and outlook of contemporary Hindu philosophy which has lost the sense of its own roots and is competing with the West. There is no real dialogue between the two, since the West is least interested in such a dialogue but, as A.N.Whitehead remarks, still continues to write footnotes to Plato. The West started with the mysticism of Parmenides, Plato, Plotinus, Ps. Dionysius and Evagrius Ponticus and reached modern day rationalism, while India started with the rationalism of the Upanishads and the systems and ended with the mysticism of Ramakrishna and Aurobindo. In spite of all quarrel with the “meta-narratives” of the classical period, Post-Modern philosophy of the West has not still found its own identity. After trying Pragmatism, Logical Positivism, Liberationism and other ephemeral fads, Western philosophers are returning to the firm grounds of Modernity and classical metaphysics. What Sivaramakrishna presents as “contemporary” in the Hindu view is just the borrowed post-Modernity of the West. As Daya Krishna and Paul Gregorios rightly complained contemporary Indian thinking failed to draw from its own ancient sources.

The book contains several obvious over-simplifications like “The religious texts of Christianity were primarily written and the

Hindu texts were revealed" (p.62). Hindu Scriptures are too complex to be understood by interpretation, as if other Scriptures are all simple (pp.66-75). "The experience of sages and saints shows the essential unity of all religions! (p. 101). Here we have to note that one should not deny that divine revelation is perceived differently by different traditions, as intuition by Hindu sages who expressed that intuition in human words, as tradition by Buddhists who transmitted the teachings of Buddha in three baskets, as revelation of a heavenly book in Islam and as divine inspiration of the writers in Judaism and Christianity. Perhaps what is missed is the wellknown difference between East and West, both in the basic problem as well as the specific method: West always deals with the human bafflement with the phenomena of nature, flux and multiplicity, while India always dealt basically with human suffering. Greeks sought the Form of all forms as the formal and efficient cause, while East looked for the material/Maternal Womb of all things.

Perhaps there is confusion about the understanding of philosophy itself. One cannot present the mystical "madness" of Sri Ramakrishna, psychic perceptions of the author, or the highly personal instructions of Sri Ram, the author's personal guru, and the intuitions of sages all as philosophy. Though helpful to philosophy, these are not philosophy itself. As systematic discussion of the ultimate causes of life and reality it is meaningful discourse. In this the Hindu classical texts are enduring models of philosophical discourse.

DECOLONIZING THE HINDU MIND, IDEOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT OF HINDU REVIVALISM, Dr. Koenraad Elst, New Delhi: Rupa & Co, 2001, pp.657, Rs.595

Born in a Flemish Catholic family Koenraad Elst spent several years in India working as a columnist for a number of Belgian and Indian papers. During his stay at Benares Hindu University he became interested in the Ayodhya conflict and studied the ideological dimension of the Hindu revivalism. Among the umpteen volumes available on this topic Konraad's book distinguishes itself by identifying fully with the ideals and aspirations of the Hindutva people. Though he secured in 1998 a doctorate from the Katholieke University of Leuven by this study of Hindu revivalism, as he himself states, he put back into the book several questionable sections which he had to leave out from the thesis under instruction from the supervisors. So the scholarly character of the book suffers from his uncritical defense of the positions of Hindu revivalists including that of the late nineteenth century pioneers like Swami Dayananda Saraswati and Swami Vivekananda and the more recent leaders like Swatantryaveer Sarvarkar and Guru Golwalkar. By Hindu revivalism is meant a broad trend "to *revive* Hinduism after a benumbing near millennium of political, ideological and psychological subjection to Islamic and Western hegemony" (p. 9). There is no question of going back to the roots of Hindu thought and cultural identity but rather of integrating the gains of Modernity, which is definitely Western, and the secular ideologies like that of Marxism, in order to fight off intellectually and politically the perceived threats posed by Islam and Christianity. So it is rather a "reconstruction" than revival of Hinduism. Though the objective is to restore the original spirit of Hinduism the net result is a total selling out to the Western conquest mentality and colonialism.

The book contains a detailed account of the Hindu criticism of Muslim, especially Qur'anic negative statements about religions other than Islam and the call for *jihad*, the holy war against people

outside the *Umma*. There is also defense of the fourfold programme of the Hindu revivalists, namely social reform, *suddhi* or effort to "reconvert" Muslims and Christians to Hinduism, *samghata* or strong organization of the Hindu community and the promotion of polemical discourse in the place of dialogue (p.592). The assassination of Mahatma Gandhi is justified because he tried to placate the Muslims, and the gruesome burning to death of Graham Steins with his two young sons is defended by the allegation that he tried to use the service to lepers an occasion to preach Christ! He uncritically accepts the position of Hindu writers who with no solid evidence hold that Hinduism was the original religion of India, ignoring even the fact that Buddhism was for over a millennium *the* religion of India before it was wiped out of its native place by Hindu kings. The author's criticism of Christianity is very much coloured by recent Hindu polemics. For example he ties evidence for the Indian apostolate of St. Thomas the disciple of Jesus entirely to the account of the *Acts of Thomas* completely ignoring the tradition in the West widespread in the early centuries of disinterested witnesses like Ephrem, Eusebius, Pantaenus, Ambrose and Gregory Nazianzen and quotes with approval the class room judgement of Frank de Graeve that the St. Thomas story was highly apocryphal and that Christianity came to India only in the fourth century (275-8). Though the book is based on a thesis approved for doctorate, the author's putting back in a good deal of controversial stuff excluded by the supervisors makes its scholarship highly questionable. This is just another link in the intellectual neocolonialism represented by Hindu revivalism!

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